The Radio Boys With the Border Patrol

GERALD BRECKENRIDGE

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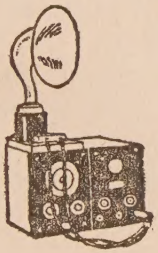
The motor was already well tuned, everything was working satisfactorily.
(*Frontis*) (*The Radio Boys with the Border Patrol.*)

THE RADIO BOYS
WITH THE BORDER PATROL

By GERALD BRECKENRIDGE

AUTHOR OF

"The Radio Boys on the Mexican Border," "The Radio Boys with the Revenue Guards," "The Radio Boys on Secret Service Duty," "The Radio Boys Search for the Incas Treasure," "The Radio Boys Rescue the Lost Alaska Expedition," "The Radio Boys in Darkest Africa," "The Radio Boys Seek the Lost Atlantis."



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THE

RADIO BOYS SERIES

A SERIES OF STORIES FOR BOYS OF ALL AGES

By GERALD BRECKENRIDGE

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The Radio Boys on Secret Service Duty
The Radio Boys with the Revenue Guards
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THE RADIO BOYS WITH THE BORDER PATROL

CHAPTER I.

THE ARMY FLYER.

THE tall, sun-browned man whose active sinewy figure belied his fifty years closed the switch, whipped off the headphones and smiling fondly turned to his visitor.

"Let's go out to the field, Captain Cornell," he said, "and you'll see as pretty a landing as any flyer in the Southwest can make. That was my boy Jack. Radioed he'd be here in ten minutes."

The uniformed army flyer from the Laredo flight of the Border Patrol smiled and nodded. Younger than Mr. Hampton by many years, in fact but half his age, he yet found his host a congenial spirit. Since his forced landing that morning on the terrace which the Hamptons had cleared on their Southwestern ranch, the two men had found much

in common to discuss. Already they were fast on the way towards becoming real friends.

Together they stepped from the radio shack into the hot sunshine. After the comparative coolness of the interior with its whirring electric fan, the outdoors was like a furnace. League on league the mesquite covered plains stretched away to the distant needle-like peaks of the westward range, unbroken by building of any sort; by tree or moving object.

Behind them, however, lay the group of ranch buildings. There was the long low main structure, built of timbers and 'dobe, thick-walled, with cool interior and a shaded patio built about a spring. To one side rose a spindling tower at the foot of which crouched the radio shack. On the right was the corrugated-iron hanger, radiating heat like an oven in shimmering heat waves; and towards this the two men made their way.

"You certainly do yourself well here," said Captain Cornell, looking from the beautifully levelled landing field, with its hanger and piped gas flares for night lighting, to the radio tower and the comfortable ranch house. The stables and corrals were out of sight in a draw, hidden by the dwelling.

Mr. Hampton nodded.

"Why not?" he asked. "I have all the money I need and more. Besides, as I told you, Jack is out

here experimenting for the radio people, and they paid for doing over my little station and equipping it anew."

By now they had reached the landing field, and Mr. Hampton raising his voice shouted: "Ho Tom."

A figure, followed by another, rounded the corner of the hanger. Tom Bodine and his new assistant had been lounging on the shaded side.

"A great old-timer," commented Mr. Hampton in a low voice as Tom Bodine approached in response to his beckoning wave of a hand. "Tell you some time about how he saved the lives of Jack and his pals, Bob Temple and Frank Merrick. It was down in old Mexico, when the boys were all several years younger."

The flyer noted with approval the sinewy muscular figure of the ex-cowpuncher who approached without self-consciousness, alone, his assistant having dropped back. Grizzled, sun-browned, walking with the rolling gait of the man who had spent a lifetime in the saddle, Tom Bodine looked what he was—an outdoor man of the wide open ranges.

Mr. Hampton introduced them, and the two men shook hands. Each noted with a pleasurable thrill the firm grip of the other.

"Jack radioed he'd be landing soon," said Mr. Hampton.

Through puckered eyelids his sharp blue eyes

swept the sky to the south. A haze which had filled the sky for days, telling of sand whipped off of the Mexican desert hundreds of miles away by a wind storm, obscured the air.

"There he comes," he said suddenly, pointing.

The gaze of the others followed. Heads nodded. They, too, saw the distant speck which betokened the approaching plane.

"Guess I left him plenty of room for landing," said the army man, casting a glance towards his own De Haviland near the hanger.

"Yes, suh," said Tom, not withdrawing his gaze from the sky. "I wasn't here when you come down, but afterwards I wheeled yo'r bus to the south end. See? She won't be in Jack's way. Besides, that boy could land on a nickel a'most."

There was such obvious pride in his voice that again Captain Cornell smiled discreetly. To himself he said that he wished people felt that way about him. But he did not do himself justice. He was one of the best-liked men of the Border Patrol.

On came Jack, the thrumming of his motor clearly heard by the watchers below. When almost overhead, the tune of the motor changed, and Captain Cornell's practised ear could tell that Jack had throttled down to eight or nine hundred revolutions He was nosing down. His plane was shooting earthward.

When little more than a thousand feet up, the plane was thrown into a tight spiral. Then Jack began circling downward.

"Pretty work," muttered the army flyer. And Mr. Hampton overhearing could have gripped the other's hand in his pleasure. The way to his heart lay through praise of his motherless son.

At two hundred feet the plane was seen to straighten out, and then Jack leaned overside and waved a greeting. He dropped down within fifty feet and then, with wide-open motor, roared along above the field towards the north end. There he turned for the landing.

"Always a ticklish task for a young flyer," commented Captain Cornell, as the three men stood grouped and motionless, watching, while waiting beside the hanger could be seen the figure of the mechanic. "But he certainly handles himself like a veteran. Look at that," he commented, as Jack shot downward in a shallow glide. "Beautiful."

Jack levelled off a foot or so above the ground. Then tail-skid and wheels dropped to the hard-packed sand for a three-point landing.

"Beautiful," the army flyer commented again, as he and Mr. Hampton started forward, with Tom Bodine rolling-leggedly alongside.

Tom and the mechanic who approached from the other side took the wings and guided the idling ship

towards the hanger, but Jack waved them away.

"Let her go boys," he said. "I want to run the motor out of gas."

Obedient they stepped back. Then in a few moments, Jack snapped her off, and stepped out of the cockpit.

"Hello, Dad," he called. "Got your message about Captain Cornell having honored us, so here I am. But if I hadn't been taking Isabella for a ride when you radioed this morning, you wouldn't have gotten me. Their radio's out of commission. Tell you about it later. But here I am running on and you haven't introduced us yet. Captain Cornell, I guess," he added, turning squarely towards the army man, and holding out his hand.

"And mighty glad to meet you," asserted the other, as their hands met. "Pretty landing," he added.

Jack flushed under the praise but so tanned was he like all the others that it would have been hard to distinguish the mantling blood in his cheeks.

"Oh, that was nothing," he demurred. "But still it's mighty nice of you to say so. Excuse me a minute while I talk with Tom. Something I want him to fix up."

So saying, he strode off to where Tom Bodine and his mechanic were now trundling the plane into the hanger.

Captain Cornell saw a square-shouldered lean youth, hard as nails, almost six feet tall, with an open and ingenuous countenance who bore himself with an air of confident assurance. When Mr. Hampton earlier had been elaborating on Jack's merits and capabilities and had told him somewhat of the confidence reposed in his son by the great radio trust which had commissioned him to carry out experiments in research and engineering problems, the army flyer had been inclined to discount the tale to a certain extent on the ground of parental partiality. But now he experienced an instinctive liking for Jack, and felt that in all likelihood Mr. Hampton had not been exaggerating.

His thoughts were interrupted by Jack's quick return.

"Whew," said Jack, tearing off his helmet and letting his damp hair blow in the light wind. "This heat is terrible. Haven't had a day like this for ages. Big storm working up from the south, I'm afraid. Certainly was cooler up above. Well come on, let's get out of the sun. Besides, I want something cool to drink. Then you can tell me how you happened to land here, Captain Cornell. And, I'll have something that will interest a man of the Border Patrol, or else I'm mighty badly mistaken."

"Why, Jack, what do you mean?" questioned his father, striding beside him towards the house.

"Sounds mysterious," commented Captain Cornell, on Jack's right.

"That's what it is, too—mysterious," said Jack. Something brewing down there in the mountains behind Rafaela's home that I don't understand. Neither does her father. But let's get inside where it's cool, and I'll tell you all I know about it, which isn't much."

CHAPTER II.

"THAT DEVIL RAMIREZ."

With laughing apology for an ever-present appetite, Jack declared he must have food as well as the cooling limeade set out for him on the table in the shaded patio. So Ramon of the grizzled bushy hair and the drooping mustache and brown-paper cigarette was summoned from the kitchen, and with remarkable celerity he had salads and cold meat for all three on the table.

While he ate, Jack, out of politeness, questioned Captain Cornell regarding the accident which had forced him down, learning it was due to a leak in his gas tank which Tom Bodine already had soldered.

"I would have been on my way, thanks to your father filling my tank," explained the army flyer, "but I am merely on my way back to Laredo, with no particular reason for getting there in a hurry, and so I decided to stay and give myself the pleasure of meeting you."

He paused, regarding Jack curiously. Certainly this unassuming, quiet-mannered young fellow,

scarcely out of his 'teens, did not resemble the taker of hair breadth chances whom he had pictured mentally as a result of listening to Mr. Hampton's descriptions of some of the escapades enjoyed by Jack and his two pals, Bob Temple and Frank Merrick, in South America, Africa, the Far North and at home. Neither did he look like a scientist, yet Mr. Hampton had assured Captain Cornell that his son was out here performing abstruse research experiments in radio for the benefit of the great radio trust.

Jack's blue eyes twinkled, and looking at his father he shook his head as if in humorous disgust.

"Been boring visitors again, Dad, with your reminiscenses," he said. "So that's your idea of hospitality, hey?"

And turning to Captain Cornell, he added:

"You know how it is with fond parents, Captain. Don't mind him. And don't hold what he says against me."

"All right, I won't," laughed the other. "But, if I may be pardoned for seeming personal, how is it you happen to be here without your pals? Your father spoke of you three as being inseparable."

"Well, you see," explained Jack, "I was a year ahead of the other fellows at Yale. I took my degree in engineering at Sheffield in the Spring. The others are plugging away on their Senior year. They'll be through in a matter of six weeks or so, and

then they'll be out to spend the Summer with me."

"I didn't get a chance to explain all your history, Jack," interpolated Mr. Hampton with a laugh.

"I see." Captain Cornell nodded. "And what do you all intend to do then? Get into more adventures? Things are pretty quiet along the border nowadays."

Jack looked up from his salad, his face grown grave.

"Not so quiet as you might think, Captain," he said. "That's what I intended to tell you about."

His father and the army flyer sat forward alertly, with a sudden scraping of chair legs on the flagstone paving of the patio.

"What do you mean, Jack?" asked Mr. Hampton.

Jack pushed back his plate and slumped down comfortably in his chair, his crossed ankles resting on the curbing of the fountain.

"Something I learned at Don Ferdinand's today," he said.

Don Ferdinand was an irascible yet lovable old Spanish aristocrat living in the Sonoran mountains of old Mexico below the border. Several years before Jack and his father had made the old Don's acquaintance under strange circumstances. Don Ferdinand was immensely wealthy and lived in feudal state in a palace in the wilderness, surrounded by many retainers. At that time he had been in

opposition to the Obregon government. Seeking to embroil Mexico and the United States and thus further his plans for unseating Obregon as President, he had made a raid across the border and carried Mr. Hampton away captive. He then had sent word to Mr. Temple, his prisoner's partner and the father of Jack's big pal, Bob Temple, to the effect that Mr. Hampton would be held for ransom. Don Ferdinand had figured that Mr. Temple would appeal to the American government and that thus trouble between the Obregon government and the United States would be engendered. But Jack Hampton and his pals undertook to rescue the older man without public appeal, and penetrating the Sonoran wilderness they managed to accomplish their object. Since then Don Ferdinand and Mr. Hampton had become fast friends. As for Jack and the Senorita Rafaela, they had corresponded with each other, and now that Jack was back in the South-west, he had spent more and more time below the border.

After his remark, Jack sat silent an appreciable space of time. Finally, his father becoming impatient broke out with:

"Well, well, Jack, go on. You say something happened down at Don Ferdinand's today, and you get us all excited. What was it?"

"I don't know that you could really say some-

thing happened," said Jack, choosing his words carefully. "But Don Ferdinand got pretty warm under the collar. Anyway, I'll start at the beginning—it wasn't much, and yet it might mean a lot —and I'll give it to you as I got it."

Old Ramon came slithering across the flagstones in the moccasins which he always wore because of tender feet, and Jack cast a glance at him and then ceased speaking until the Mexican had deposited the coffee cups and departed with the luncheon plates.

"Don Ferdinand told me not to speak of this to anybody whom we couldn't trust thoroughly," he said, by way of explanation, and with a nod towards the departing figure of Ramon he added: "The old man is a good *hombre* so far as we knew. But Don Ferdinand was insistent that I shouldn't let out a word before any Mexicans.

"It was mighty warm down there, with that hot wind blowing, and I hadn't slept well. Too hot for comfort. Pitched and tossed all night. Flew down yesterday afternoon," he threw out for Captain Cornell's understanding. "So the old don, Rafaela and I were sitting in the patio this morning, trying to keep cool. He was asleep, I expect, because he hadn't said a word for a long time. So was the old duenna in the background somewhere. Rafaela and I were talking in low voices, so as not to disturb the others.

"A man came into the patio, a rough-looking, villainous fellow. I did not remember ever seeing him about the place, but then there is a veritable army of retainers always hanging about, a sort of feudal lot of dependents; so that wasn't strange. Anyway, Rafaela knew him, for, when he made a low bow and stood there with his high-crowned sombrero in hand, she spoke to him sharply, asking what he wanted. He replied that he wanted to speak to Don Ferdinand, and Rafaela waked her father.

"Don Ferdinand took a good look at the man, then he jumped up out of his chair.

" 'You, Pedro, what are you doing here?' he demanded. 'So far from the mine? Has anything gone wrong?'

"Pedro came closer, said something in a low voice. Then Don Ferdinand cast a quick glance toward Rafaela and me.

" 'Ah, Senor Jack,' he said, 'a thousand pardons. Permit me— There is a little matter of business to attend to.' And with a bow to me he made off toward his office. Pedro at his heels.

"Well," said Jack, leaning back, "I didn't think much about the incident. These fellows are always so mysterious anyhow, about the merest trifles. I didn't even ask Rafaela who the fellow was. She herself volunteered the information, saying he was foreman of a silver mine far back in the mountains

which Don Ferdinand owns. For a long time, the old don had refrained from working the mine. He had sealed it up during the troubled years following the Madero revolution, although when Diaz had been President it had been a big producer. Now he had resumed operations again.

" 'Some little trouble at the mine brings Pedro,' said Rafaela. 'Oh, you men with your business. But look, Jack,' she added, in a low voice, 'Donna Ana sleeps.'

"I looked around. The old duenna was snoozing so hard, it would have taken an earthquake to wake her.

" 'The heat's got her,' I said, for it certainly was hot, even there in the shaded patio.

"I guess Rafaela thought me pretty dense, by the way she looked at me.

" 'Is that all you can think about?' she asked. 'But, you think about the heat—well, wouldn't it be fine to go flying? So nice and cool?'

"Then I tumbled. 'Come on,' I said, 'let's go.'

"We tiptoed out of the patio like a couple of conspirators. The old duenna never stirred. Don Ferdinand wasn't in sight. Neither was anybody else at the front of the house. And out behind, in the quarters, I expect everybody was taking a siesta. Anyway, we couldn't hear a sound.

"So off we trotted across the lawn and disappeared

among the eucalyptus trees—you know, Dad, cutting off the house from the don's landing field?"

Mr. Hampton nodded, a reminiscent light in his eyes. He was remembering the scene which had become so familiar during his period of captivity several years before.

Captain Cornell opened his eyes. "A landing field?" he demanded, incredulously.

"Oh, yes," explained Jack. "Several years back, when the old don was an unreconstructed Mexican rebel, he had a couple of airplanes in his pay. Several of his aviators even stole ours—that is Bob's and Frank's—airplane. But we got it back. The airplanes are gone, as well as most of the rebel army Don Ferdinand was feeding at that time. But the flying field remains. It's in pretty good shape too.

"Anyhow," he continued, "Rafaela and I popped out on the field, and I put her in the plane. Then I stirred up a couple of sleepy Mexicans whom I've trained to help me. We got her going, and after I'd warmed her up, we took off for a spin.

"And, say, Dad," he added, in a burst of enthusiasm, "that girl's one good sport. She certainly loves to fly. One of these days I'm just going to have to teach her. Trouble is, they never let her go up. This was only her second or third flight. And, my, how tickled she was over stealing away from her duenna."

Mr. Hampton tried to look reproving but failed lamentably. Nevertheless, he warned: "Just the same, you mustn't do that again, Jack, without her father's consent. What if something happened, some accident?"

"Oh, shucks," said Jack, "I didn't fly high with her, and I didn't take off until the old bus was tuned up and running like a watch. Anyhow," he added, hastening to change the subject, "it was a good thing I went up because it was then I got your radio message, saying Captain Cornell was here and asking me to come home. The don's station was out of order again. Some Mexican kid is always monkeying with something or other and putting the whole works out of commission. When it's working, Rafaela says, they get all the big stations. And"—he laughed—"she says it's a regular thing for all the Mexicans to turn out since I installed that loud speaker for them, and dance on the flying field at night to the band music they pull out of the air.

"Well, anyhow, back we flew, and I landed her safely and left the motor idling while we walked up to the house. I intended to see her home, say goodbye to the don, and come back.

"The old duenna was still asleep. But just as we stepped back in the patio Don Ferdinand appeared in a state of pretty high excitement. I thought for a minute he was going to comb me for taking

Rafaela up in the plane without permission. But, no; he wasn't even aware that we had been flying.

"'What's the matter, father?' asked Rafaela, anxiously. 'Has anything happened? Did Pedro bring bad news?'

"The old don walked up and down a few steps, clasping and unclasping his hands behind his back. 'Just when the mine was beginning to pay again,' he mourned.

"'Tell me what is the matter, father,' demanded Rafaela.

"He halted and faced us. 'Matter? Matter?' said he. 'Matter enough. That devil Ramirez has lured all my men away. They laugh when Pedro begs them to stay and say they will follow Ramirez who will make them rich. Pedro cannot get anybody to work.'

"'But you can send other men,' said Rafaela.

"'Bah,' said Don Ferdinand. 'You are just a girl. What do you know about such matters? If Ramirez takes some men, will he not take others?'

"Rafaela shrugged and spread out her hands. 'But you are rich, father. You need not worry about the mine.'

"'Foolish child,' said Don Ferdinand, and he appealed to me. 'Women do not know,' said he. 'Why does Ramirez lure my men away, if not to make revolution? And revolution will upset everything

again. Bah, we have had enough of revolutions.'"

Mr. Hampton interrupted with an abrupt but hearty laugh.

"Isn't that just like him? He wants no revolutions unless he makes them himself. When I think of several years ago—" And he laughed again.

Jack smiled, too. "That's what I thought, Dad," he said. And then, becoming serious, he added: "Anyhow, there is another revolution brewing, Captain Cornell, it is liable to make trouble for you fellows of the Border Patrol."

The army flyer nodded. His face wore a puzzled frown.

"Ramirez?" he said. "Ramirez? Never heard of him. And I know most of the trouble-makers by name, besides. Your friend Don Ferdinand referred to him as 'that devil Ramirez,' hey? Did he explain further?"

"No," said Jack. "He just cautioned me not to speak of this to any of our Mexicans, and said he would have more news for me later. Then I came away. I don't know," he added thoughtfully; "I don't know but what he contemplates lighting out after Ramirez himself. He's quite an intrepid old fellow, you know."

The conversation thereupon became more general, Captain Cornell questioning Jack regarding his radio experiments. They walked out to the radio shack.

And there Jack launched into an enthusiastic description of his work. He was seeking, he said, to work out some of the fundamental problems demanding solution as a result of the tremendous increase in both broadcasting stations and receivers.

"There are six or seven such problems," he said. "First, we must have a radio receiver which will provide super-selectivity—a receiver which will enable the operator to select any station he wants to hear, whether or not local stations are operating. Such selectivity must go to the theoretical limits of the science. "Here"—pointing to a litter on a work bench which was only a meaningless jumble to the flyer—"is a pretty close approach, or it soon will be," he corrected himself, "to what I want. It will be a super-sensitive receiver, giving volume from distant stations as well as selectivity."

Here and there he went about the shack, taking up or lying down pieces of apparatus, and keeping up a running fire of comment which made the flyer's head swim.

He was working, he said, on the problem of achieving a "non-radiating" receiver—one, which, no matter how handled, wouldn't interfere with a neighbor's enjoyment. He was trying to improve the complicated Super-Heterodyne in sensitiveness and selectivity, so that anybody could have access to

its wonders, regardless of whether he possessed any engineering skill.

And at that point, Captain Cornell groaning humorously clapped his hand to his head and staggered toward the door.

"Great Scott, Mr. Hampton," he appealed, "call him off, will you? I didn't know there *was* so much to radio. I'm willing to believe your son's the greatest radio engineer in the world, but tell him to have a heart. Understanding about airplanes is as far as my feeble intelligence will carry me. I can't cram radio into it, too."

The Hamptons both laughed, and followed him outside. There, with a look at the sky, Captain Cornell gave a sudden startled exclamation.

"I'll have to be getting along," he said. "Just enough daylight going to be left for me to get to Laredo. Besides, I don't like that look in the South. One of these desert siroccos playing away off there somewhere. And who knows when it may take a notion to come wandering up here? Will you folks help me get away?"

CHAPTER III.

DON FERDINAND DISAPPEARS

Tom Bodine had seen them start across the field, and by the time they reached the side of the big De Haviland used by the Border Patrol flyer, the motors were gently idling. Tom clambering out of the cockpit announced proudly that everything was shipshape.

Captain Cornell's face beamed as he took his place in the front cockpit. This was real service. He liked Tom, good man. He liked these Hamptons, too. His practiced eye ran over the dials in front of him, noting that air pressure, temperature, and oil pressure were correct. The big bomber breathing fire from its exhaust pipes as it strained against the wheel blocks was like a great bird eager to take the air.

A sudden thought came to Captain Cornell, and leaning out he shouted through cupped hands in order to make himself heard above the roar of the warming motor:

"I'll look up Ramirez's record in Laredo and give you a call on the radio if I learn anything."

Jack shook his head. He couldn't hear. Captain Cornell throttled down and repeated his words.

"All right," shouted Jack. "And if I can be of any help, call on me. And, say, Captain," he added as an afterthought, "I'll be dropping in on you at Laredo one of these days. Dad and I want to see a bull fight. Maybe you'll take us over into the Mexican town."

"Surest thing you know," the flyer called. "Come on a Sunday."

Then with the battery charging and the motor firing sweetly, he threw off one switch of the double-ignition system in order to listen for breaks in the twelve-cylinder Liberty. The same operation on the other. Both running true. A wave of the hand, in farewell, and he eased the throttle on. Slowly the tachometer climbed up the scale, showing increasing revolutions.

The flyer nodded to Tom and Jack at the wings. They disappeared and then popped out, dragging the wheel blocks. Tom's assistant stepped away from the tail. Then the big ship started forward easily, smoothly, and within thirty yards the tail-skid left the ground. Motor roaring without a break, the De Haviland ran a bit farther, then took the air. Driving along a little above the ground, it shot upward. Then a right bank and the flyer circled the field, making sure his great plane was running true before

letting her out for Laredo. Twice around the field, and then away shot the ship.

"Some bus," said Jack.

None of the little group had said a word up to then.

"Lot more trouble to work her than your little racer, Jack," said Tom Bodine with the freedom born of years of friendship.

Jack nodded. "Some day I'm going to ask Captain Cornell to let me handle her. If I ever see him again," he added, as he and Mr. Hampton returned toward the house.

But Jack was to see Captain Cornell again, and that right soon.

In the meantime, he spent the next several days engaged on his radio experimentation. Mr. Hampton saw little of him, except at meals. But the older man was himself engaged, being deep in the writing of a technical engineering paper. So the time did not hang heavy on his hands.

Jack reported one night enthusiastically that his research had definitely established that the complicated Super-Heterodyne could be simplified to the point where anybody, "even a child," he said with such a tone of scorn as to make his father smile, could work it. Then he plunged again into his experiments.

Four or five days after the unexpected visit of the

army flyer, Tom Bodine returning from a ride into Red Butte, ten miles away, brought a bundle of mail. Mail at the ranch was always an event, so Jack was summoned from his radio shack to the house, and he and his father abandoned their various pursuits for the time being.

"Oh, I say, Dad, here's a letter from Frank," cried Jack, pouncing on a bulky missive, and slitting it open. "Now to hear the news from home." And with the stiff sheets crinkling, he threw himself down in a deep leather chair while his eyes started to devour the page.

The next moment he bounded to his feet with a whoop.

"Hurray, Dad," he shouted, "Guess what! The fellows have both passed their exams. Now they have nothing to do for six weeks, when they'll have to show up for Commencement. They're coming out to spend the intervening time with us." His eyes skimmed the pages. "Been planning on this for a long time but kept it a secret. Bob wasn't sure he could pass, but he crammed. Got a creditable rating. And Mr. Temple's coming, too. What do you know about that, Dad?"

And tossing the letter upon the table, Jack grabbed his father by the shoulders and began whirling him around the room. Not until he had kicked over several chairs and bumped into the table with a crash

that brought a howl of pain did he come to a halt. Then Mr. Hampton looked at his flushed face and shining eyes and shook his head.

"Yes, Temple told me the same thing here," he said, extending the letter he himself had been reading. He shook his head. "Poor Temple and I. We'll have our hands full."

"They'll be here— Let's see." Jack retrieved the letter from the table, turning to the date. "Why, they'll be at San Antone the twentieth. And this is the seventeenth, isn't it? I lose track of time out here. Stay in San Antone a day, and then come on to Red Butte. Golly, Dad, they'll be here in five days."

The next day Jack announced he was going to carry the news to their friends in Mexico. They would be glad to hear it, he said, especially Don Ferdinand who had taken a great liking to big Bob Temple because of the way in which the young athlete had performed prodigies of strength in the rescue of Mr. Hampton, several years before. Don Ferdinand had been the victim, but he was a game loser. And because of the warm friendliness which had developed between the two parties since that bygone time, he could afford to smile at all that had happened now.

"Why don't you go along with me, Dad?" Jack suddenly suggested. "Do you good to get away

from your poky old writing. Come on. Blow the cobwebs out of your brain."

"Believe I will," said Mr. Hampton, after a moment or two of thought. "Wait till I tell Ramon we won't be home for dinner. He'd feel hurt if we didn't let him know. Besides, I'll need my helmet and goggles."

While he was absent, Jack and Tom Bodine tuned up the motor of Jack's two-seater, of which Tom stood in considerable awe, yet which he teasingly referred to as "Jack's air flivver."

Mr. Hampton returned wearing a puzzled expression. He explained that he had been unable to find Ramon. This was strange, as the old fellow seldom stirred from his kitchen. He inquired of Tom whether the latter had seen him since breakfast. Tom shook his head in denial, but his tow-headed assistant, a youngster from Red Butte, who approached in time to overhear the question, spoke up.

"Yes sir, Mr. Hampton, I seen him light out toward Red Butte 'bout an hour or two ago. He come out o' the back o' the house soon after breakfast. I was out here where I sleep"—nodding toward the hanger. "He was hobblin' right fast on them bad feet o' hisn. Stops by the road an' along comes that Mexican feller in town what runs the flivver at the station, just like he had a date t' meet

Ramon. So the old feller gets in an' away they go toward Red Butte."

Mr. Hampton's face cleared.

"Oh, I suppose he wanted to go to Red Butte to order supplies," he said. "But it's queer he didn't say something about it at breakfast. Well, come on, Jack. Let's get going. You fellows will have to feed yourselves, Tom. I think there's plenty of food in the storehouse, and I know how well you can cook flapjacks. So I guess you won't starve before Ramon gets back. We'll be back tomorrow. Don Ferdinand wouldn't let us come back tonight, I know."

Thereupon, at a nod from Jack, Tom and his assistant who was known as "Whitey," withdrew the wheel blocks. The motor was already well tuned, everything was working satisfactorily. Jack glanced up at the wind-indicator, noting that the take-off would be south, just as he was headed. Then he advanced the throttle smoothly, being careful not to over-feed the motor, and the graceful light plane instantly started forward in response.

A quick shoot forward, then up. When his altimeter showed he was up twelve hundred feet, and with everything running smoothly, Jack dropped the flying field behind and headed away for the distant mountains within which lay Don Ferdinand's feudal estate.

Before starting he had suggested that his father

should endeavor to call Don Ferdinand on the radio from the plane. The German who once, in the don's belligerent days, had operated the radio outfit, long since had taken his departure. But Jack had instructed Manuel Sanchez, an intelligent young fellow of Don Ferdinand's retainers, in the operation of the radio station. He had even overhauled the two-way station himself recently. If Manuel had succeeded in restoring the outfit to working condition since Jack's last visit, Mr. Hampton might be able to get a response.

However, no response was received. And at the end of an hour and a half of flying over bare untrodden desert country giving way to foothills, Jack finally crossed the top of a low range and their destination appeared in the valley below.

Jack swooped downward and leveled off a foot above the ground of the flying field. Nobody came running, but that was nothing unusual. Since Don Ferdinand had dispensed with his airplanes, the field was deserted. Only when Jack departed after a visit could the men whom he had trained to help in the take-off be found at hand. His hand dragged back on the stick, and he dropped to the hard-packed sand for a perfect three-point landing, wheels and tail-skid hitting together.

Shutting off the motor, Jack and Mr. Hampton climbed out and started for the house. There was

no danger in leaving the plane. None of Don Ferdinand's people would have dared approach Jack's plane or touch it.

As they walked toward the eycalyptus grove shielding the house from the flying field, a lithe, slender figure, skirts fluttering, emerged from the trees, and began to run toward them.

"Rafaela," cried Jack, and darting away from his father's side he ran to meet her.

Mr. Hampton smiled and continued at his own more sober pace. He saw them meet, and saw Jack suddenly take Rafaela in his arms.

That was a surprise.

"Great guns," he muttered. "I didn't know affairs were that far along."

But when he approached closer he saw that Rafaela was crying and that Jack was trying to comfort her.

Jack looked up at him, an expression of dismay on his face.

"I can't make much out of this, Dad," he said, "except that Don Ferdinand has disappeared, and Rafaela is dreadfully worried."

CHAPTER IV.

WORD FROM DON FERDINAND

RAFAELA pulled away from Jack's arms quickly at Mr. Hampton's approach. The latter cast her a sharp glance and noted some slight confusion which his quick perception told him was not due solely to her anxiety over her father's disappearance. He glanced at Jack, a question in his eyes. Jack grinned shamelessly, and Mr. Hampton had difficulty preserving a sober countenance. Evidently, his handsome son did not object to offering Rafaela comfort in her distress.

Then his thoughts leaped to the words still ringing in his ears, informing him that Don Ferdinand had disappeared. He turned to Rafaela to question her. But at that moment, she emitted a sharp exclamation as she held up a sealed envelope and examined the superscription.

"Why, this is from my father," she cried.

"From your father?" exclaimed Jack. "Thought you said he had disappeared?"

"I did say he had disappeared," answered Rafaela,

ripping open the envelope. And pulling out the folded sheet which it contained she read it eagerly.

"Ah, this explains it," she added, dropping to her side the hand holding the note, and facing the two men.

"But come, let us go to the house. It is too hot to stand here in the sun. Besides, you must be thirsty."

And snuggling her hands under Jack's and his father's nearest elbows, she started them marching toward the house.

"You have me puzzled, Rafaela," declared Jack. "First you declare your father has disappeared and you say in that funny way of yours that you are desolated. Then you get a note from him. What's the answer?"

Rafaela's teasing laugh pealed out. "What you say, Jack? 'What's the answer?' Is that some of your American slang? What does it mean?"

Mr. Hampton laughed. Rafaela was a continual delight to him.

"It means," said Jack, solemnly, "that if you don't clear up this mystery, I'll appeal to Donna Ana."

Rafaela made a grimace. "Oh, that duenna. She sleeps. Not even your airplane wakes her. But when I hear it, I run. 'Senor Jack will go search for my father who is missing four days,' I say to myself. As I run, up comes that Pedro with a note.

He would stop me. But I am so anxious to ask you to, please, go at once and search for my father, that I take his note and run. He looked after me and scratch his head. I see him, yes sir."

She looked up slyly, first at Jack, then at his father, and both laughed heartily.

"You're a little minx, Rafaela," said Mr. Hampton, pinching the shell-like ear nearest him.

"That makes it unanimous, Dad," said Jack. "But go on, Rafaela. Now what does the note say?"

"It say we must ask Pedro," declared Rafaela, as they stepped into the cool patio. She clapped her hands and a swarthy, stolid-faced woman appeared at whom she shot a volley of Spanish, whereupon the woman turned and went back under the colonnade in the direction of the servant's quarters.

"She will call Pedro, and likewise bring us limeade," said Rafaela. "Sit down."

A sound between exclamation and snort came from behind Jack and he whirled around, in the act of slipping into a big comfortable wicker chair. Donna Ana, all in black, was staring at him severely from the depths of another wicker chair in the shade of a pineapple palm. He made her a low bow, while Mr. Hampton walked up and bent over her hand with that touch of Continental gallantry which always flattered the duenna. Then he pulled his chair close to her and began a conversation.

"That's nice of Dad," said Jack, in an undertone.

Rafaela glanced at him archly.

"You are learning, Jack," she said. "That was a pretty speech."

At that moment Pedro appeared, bowing, in front of Rafaela. Mr. Hampton and Donna Ana moved closer.

"My father," said Rafaela, tapping the note, "writes only that he is well, and that I should ask you for details." She addressed him in Spanish, but as both Jack and his father understood the language, they experienced no difficulty in following the conversation.

"Four day ago I send a message to Don Ferdinand," said Pedro. "It informed him that devil Ramirez had lured away my last man from the mine and asked for instructions. Soon—the next day—Don Ferdinand appears. I am astonished. 'Your messenger came at night, Pedro,' said he. 'I left at once.' So I say to him, 'Let us make talk.' But he answers that he is fatigued and will sleep first. All day he sleeps. That night we talk. The next day he remembers suddenly that he has left you alone, with no knowledge of what had become of him. He does not want you to be alarmed. So he sends you a message. There is none to take it but Pedro. Here I am."

With a bow as graceful as a cavalier's Pedro ceased.

"But my father." Rafaela's little foot in its tiny black slipper was tapping on the flagstones. "But my father, why did he not return?"

There was a scarcely perceptible pause before Pedro replied. Then he said: "He has work to do."

"Pedro, there is something you are keeping back from me," declared Rafaela firmly. "Tell me. where is my father now?"

Shrugging, Pedro spread out his hands, but he did not answer.

Jack thought he understood. Stepping forward impetuously, he laid a hand on Pedro's shoulder, and faced him. "Look here," he said. "No tricks. If anything has happened to—"

Pedro glared blackly, but Rafaela laughed.

"Oh, Jack, you are so—so funny," she declared. "You mustn't suspect Pedro. He is my father's most trusted man." And to Pedro, she said soothingly: "This gentleman didn't understand, Pedro. He but worries about my father. If he knew, he would not hurt your feelings."

Pedro made a slight bow to Jack. "I forgive the young Senor's mistake," he said.

Jack sighed and shook his head. "But, Rafaela, what then?"

"You do not know my father," she explained. "I

fear he has done something rash and ordered Pedro not to tell me for fear I would be worried. Is it not so, Pedro?"

The latter shrugged. It was an eloquent shrug. It said plainer than words that Rafaela was correct.

The girl was silent a moment, sitting with chin cupped in hand, staring thoughtfully at the paving at her feet. Then she glanced up quickly, understanding in her eyes.

"This Ramirez of whom you speak? Where is he?"

"He marches toward Nueva Laredo," said Pedro.

"And my father has gone in pursuit of him alone," said Rafaela. It was more a challenge than a question.

Pedro hesitated. Rafaela stamped her foot. Pedro made haste to confirm her words.

"Only, Senorita, he goes not alone. A dozen men he brought with him to the mine—these lazy fellows who grow fat here on his bounty. Yet they are good fighters and will lay down their lives for him. And all are well armed."

"I knew it," said Rafaela, with conviction. "And he told you not to tell me. Well, that is all, Pedro. Rest now before you go back to the mine. For I suppose you will want to return?"

"Si, Senorita. I was not to tell, but you found out. I never could keep secrets from a woman."

Pedro's resignation was so comical that involuntarily all laughed. "And when I return," he added, "I shall want twelve more good fighters."

"You shall have them," promised Rafaela. And with a bow Pedro disappeared.

"Now," said Mr. Hampton, when he had departed, "this is a pretty kettle of fish."

" 'Kettle of fish?' " Rafaela looked inquiry.

"Some more slang," laughed Jack. "Dad is worse than I. He means here is a lot of trouble."

The maid now appeared with a great silver pitcher and a tray of glasses, a little table was pulled forward, and about it all four sat, sipping limeade, and discussing the news brought by Pedro.

"I don't think it would be worth while to question that fellow, Pedro, again," said Mr. Hampton, finally, after the situation had been thrashed over. "He's told us all he's going to tell. And I don't see, Rafaela, that there is anything we can do. Your father knows his own business, and I consider he is pretty well able to take care of himself. As far as I can see, this fellow Ramirez, whoever he is, is preparing to stir up trouble, and your father is trying to stop him. Jack and I are Americans, and we can't very well take a hand in a Mexican family row."

Jack looked disappointed. Nothing would have suited him better than to step into his plane and fly southward in search of Don Ferdinand for the pur-

pose of placing himself and his airplane at the latter's disposal. Still, his father was right.

"However, Rafaela," he supplemented, "I'm going to see that your radio station is in good running order before I leave, and you must tell your boy to keep in touch with me. Then, if you want us in a hurry, we'll be at your command."

That evening Pedro set out at dusk with twelve mounted and heavily armed men at his back. They were the pick of the young fellows about the place. Standing a little apart from Mr. Hampton and Donna Ana, Jack and Rafaela watched the departure. Pedro rode up for final instructions.

"Tell my father to be careful," said Rafaela. She was worried, but held her head high, exhibiting the same firey spirit of her father. The ghost of a smile came to her lips. "Not that he will heed," she said.

"And, Pedro," added Jack, "tell Don Ferdinand when you see him that if I can help with my airplane —for scouting—or—or something, why, to send a messenger here and have me called by radio."

Pedro nodded, then with his rapscallion yet loyal crew whirled away. Soon the dustcloud raised by their departure settled, and they were lost in the shadows of the night. The remaining Mexicans, who had gathered to watch, dispersed. The tinkle of stringed instruments came from the Mexican quar-

ters. The Hamptons, Rafaela and Donna Ana turned back to the patio. There they sat conversing until time to retire, and the next morning Mr. Hampton and Jack took their departure.

CHAPTER V.

OFF TO LAREDO.

During ensuing days Jack paid strict attention to his experimental work. He maintained daily radio communication with Rafaela, learning that there had been no further news from her father. But he made no more trips below the line. Tom Bodine tried to lure him away into the mountains on a fishing expedition, but he turned a deaf ear, leaving the older man disconsolate.

"Allus a-potterin' 'round with that radio stuff," said Tom contemptuously, lounging in the doorway of the radio shack. He made a clear-cut figure, like a Remington painting of the Old West, against the background of blazing sunshine and desert seen through the open doorway. "Don't know why yo're so crazy 'bout it, Jack," he said turning away. "Bringin' the noises o' the world into the desert, that's what yo're a-doin.' Some day ye'll regret it, when ye ain't got no place to go where ye kin have peace an' quiet." And he stumped away, with Jack's laugh ringing in his ears.

But Jack's experiments in simplification of the

Super-Heterodyne were progressing satisfactorily, and he was pushing the work eagerly in order to have something with which to surprise Frank and Bob on their arrival. He had developed a special transformer which he felt assured was superior to anything then on the market. By its use he was receiving stations from coast to coast, with crystal clarity, loud speaker volume and minimum interference. Every day he logged each station and later singled it out again with the same dial setting. And every day's patient experimentation found interference decreasing and volume and clarity growing stronger.

Then came the Saturday to which he had been looking forward as the last day on which to get everything in shape for the arrival of his two pals, who were expected on the morrow. But as he worked away that morning in the radio shack, he suddenly heard his call. It was the usual hour at which he was accustomed to call Rafaela, and as his eyes travelled to the clock he experienced a sense of guilt. So immersed in his work had he been that he had ignored calling. Doubtless, this was Rafaela summoning him.

But when he answered, a man's voice replied: "That you, Jack?"

Jack stuttered. He could hardly believe his ears. Why, it couldn't be— Yes sir, it was, it was! And

so eagerly that he could hardly make himself heard, he shouted: "Hel-lo, Bob."

"Here, get away. Give me a chance," Jack heard coming through the air. That was Frank. There was the sound of a scuffle. Then loud and clear and triumphant came Frank's voice: "The big bully. Tried to keep me away. Wanted the first word. But I—Ouch, leggo."

Again the sound of scuffling, and then first Frank and then Bob shouted into Jack's ears.

Wherever they were, the two were certainly larking. Finally, matters became pacified and then Jack got in a question as to where they were calling from.

"From Laredo," Frank informed him, "from the flying field. Decided to come around this way to reach you in order to stop off and see a bull fight. Say, Jack, they tell us tomorrow will be the finest bull fight in months across the line in the Mexican town. We wanted to get you to come down. I thought of this stunt of asking the army flyers to let us call you—"

"That's a tall one, Jack," cut in Bob. "It was my bright idea."

Another scuffling bout. "Great Scott," said Jack to himself, his face in one broad grin of delight, "they've been penned up in a train for days and they've just got to let off their animal spirits.

Only hope they don't tear things to pieces for the army men."

"Tell you what, fellows," he said, when again matters had been pacified. "I'll get Dad and we'll fly down late this afternoon. Look for us about sunset. Then we can all go to the bull fight tomorrow."

"That's the idea," endorsed Bob. "We want you, old scout. Kind of miss you, you know, and that sort of thing." Bob was growing facetious to hide his deeper feelings. "Besides," he concluded, "my father is here, too, and he sort of wants to foregather with your Dad."

"Can't blame him, can you, Jack?" cut in Frank. "Think of his having to put up with Bob so many days."

"Hey, you fellows, cut that out, and listen to me," expostulated Jack, as sounds reaching him indicated the friendly wrestling bout was being renewed. And when he once more had Bob's ear, he told him to look up Captain Cornell.

"Shucks, Jack, you're late," said Bob. "It was Captain Cornell who gave us the run of the place soon as we told him we were your friends and that it was you we wanted to radio."

"Yes, Jack," added Frank, "he told us to be sure and get you to come to Laredo for tomorrow's bull

fight. Said he promised to take you to see a good one, and that this promised to be it."

As soon as the conversation was ended, Jack declared a truce to work for the time being and set out at a run for the house. Hardly had he gotten beyond the door of the shack, however, than conscience smote him for not having communicated with Rafaela. Turning back, he endeavored to call her but was unable to get any response. "Some Mexican kid pulled out a couple of wires again, I guess," he muttered. "Well, everything must be all right or she'd have called me. No use worrying. Besides, Dad will want the news."

And, abandoning his efforts to raise Rafael's station, he set out on the run for the house.

Bursting into the comfortable living room, he found his father seated in a broad deep chair in front of the low table on which he was accustomed to do his writing, and gazing up at Tom Bodine who sat on a corner of the table at ease.

"Just talking about what we'll have for dinner, Jack," said Mr. Hampton, smiling at him. "Name your preference. Tom says he may not be able to give us Mexican dishes like Ramon, but that since Ramon deserted and left him the post of cook he'll feed us American style. Now last night we had—"

"Yes," grinned Jack, "I know what we had. beef and eggs, and night before eggs and beef.

But old Tom needn't worry his head about how to vary the menu tonight, because you and I won't be here."

"Won't be here?" Mr. Hampton stared.

"No sir," said Jack, "we'll be eating at the Hamilton Hotel in Laredo."

The astonished glances of the two men were his only answer, and after enjoying their mystification a moment Jack proceeded to enlighten them.

"We're going to fly to Laredo to meet Frank and Bob and Mr. Temple," he said. "They've just radioed from the army flying field. Went to Laredo in order to stop over and see the bull fight tomorrow."

"Waal," said Tom, sliding off the table, and preparing to depart, "I kin see there's goin' to be hotter days even than we been havin' around here. Give 'em my best, Jack. An', say, better bring a cook back with ye. I'll ride inta Red Butte an' git some fresh supplies." At the door he paused to fling over a shoulder: "Don't let the bull git ye." Then he disappeared.

Jack laughed. "Come on, Dad," he urged, "put your writing away and come on out to the hanger. We'll have to go over the old bus an' get her in tip-top shape for the trip."

Pretending reluctance, yet reluctance belied by the eager twinkle in his eyes, Mr. Hampton com-

plied. And together they headed for the hanger, where each donned voluminous coveralls and went about the work of greasing and oiling, and the tightening of struts and stays.

As they worked away, each busied upon a different part of the plane from the other, each intent upon his own thoughts, there was little opportunity for conversation. But as his fingers flew about the tasks which he performed almost mechanically, Jack's thoughts were flying, too.

He started in by thinking of Bob and Frank. They had been separated more than six months, the longest period of separation for years. Communication between the two at Yale and Jack in the Southwest had been steady and continuous. Yet, after all, what good were letters? Six or seven months made a good many changes in a fellow. What were they thinking about, how were they dressing now, had Bob fully recovered from the broken collarbone incurred in the game against Harvard last Fall, was Frank putting himself in trim for the Summer tennis season in which he stood an excellent chance to rank high among the national leaders? All these and many more questions of like nature ran through Jack's thoughts.

And then, unconsciously, his thoughts drifted away from his companions to Rafaela. Why hadn't he been able to obtain a response to his call

that morning? Had affairs down there taken a new turn? If so, what? And then, suddenly, apparently without his having previously considered the matter, the mysterious disappearance of Ramon popped into Jack's mind. He gave a final turn to a loose nut and, wrench in hand, stood up and called to his father.

"What is it, Jack?" Mr. Hampton was crouched down, examining the lock nut on one of the wheels, and did not look up.

Jack walked around to the front of the plane and leaned against the fuselage, tossing up and catching his wrench.

"I say, Dad. Just thought of something."

"What?"

"About Ramon."

"Well, what about him?"

"Why, just this," said Jack. "Maybe he, too, has gone away to join this mysterious individual Ramirez. Rebels must eat, and a good cook like Ramon ought to be in demand."

"You may be right, Jack," said his father, after a moment's consideration. "But, somehow," he added, glancing up, "I have a suspicion—well, you can hardly call it that, because I have nothing to go on—say, a feeling that the mysterious Ramirez isn't contemplating revolution."

"What makes you think that?" Jack demanded

in astonishment. "Especially after what Don Ferdinand said."

"I can't explain it," said Mr. Hampton, going back to his task. "And I don't know what he can be about if it isn't the stirring up of another revolution. But, there it is. What you might call a hunch."

Jack regarded his father's bowed head with a puzzled frown. Then he straightened up and moved briskly away. "Well, this isn't getting the bus ready for her trip." And he went to work again.

Whitey appeared from somewhere presently, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes and announcing he had been up all the night attending a dance at the Horsethief Canyon School. He was put to work, but was more hindrance than help. At noon they knocked off work to take a cup of coffee and a hastily-thrown-together sandwich. Tom had taken the flivver and gone to Red Butte for supplies. Then they returned to work again.

After the plane had been lubricated and overhauled, it was trundled out onto the field, where, while it strained against the wheel blocks, Jack warmed it up. Everything was running sweet and true. It was now the middle of the afternoon. Jack once more attempted to raise Rafaela's station, but again without success.

"All right, Dad," he said. "May as well go."

Mr. Hampton was already aboard. Jack climbed into the cockpit, Whitey dragged the wheel blocks out of the way. Jack saw to it that the motor shutters were open, the spark properly advanced and the altitude adjustment was correct. Already, during the warming-up process, he had satisfied himself that the motor was working at its best. So now he threw up his hand as a farewell signal to Whitey, and slowly eased the throttle on. Five minutes later, after a perfect take-off he was well up and heading east.

CHAPTER VI.

HIT FROM THE REAR.

It was not yet dark when Jack reached the Laredo air-drome. He dropped downward, sure of his welcome. Skimming the fence on the western end of the sandy flying field, he leveled off a foot above the ground. A second later, he dragged back on the stick, and the plane came down for a perfect three-point landing of wheels and tail-skid.

As Jack stood idling, running out the gas, a little group which had been watching his descent broke up into its component parts. The members came running, and a sound of cheering reached his ears.

Big Bob Temple led, with the slighter Frank close at his heels. More sedately, Captain Cornell who had been with them approached in the rear, in companionship with Mr. Temple.

As Jack and his father reached the ground, the two youths in the lead literally fell on them and a great to-do of back-thumping and handclasping went on. Mr. Hampton was first to disentangle himself, and moved to greet his old neighbor and

lifelong friend, Mr. Temple, who stood aside watching with amused gaze the boisterous greetings of the youths. Greetings over, Mr. Hampton turned to the army flyer who expressed warm pleasure at seeing him.

All three youths by now had their arms over each others' shoulders and were doing a dance reminiscent of an Indian war fling. Not until they were breathless did they separate, whereupon Jack moved to greet Mr. Temple and Captain Cornell.

"Don't bother about your plane," said Captain Cornell. "I'll see that it's taken care of."

He beckoned to several members of the airdrome crew who took the wings on either side and guided the ship into line with a number of De Havilands.

"They'll go over it for you," said Captain Cornell, "and see that it's in ship-shape for going up whenever you want it."

"Fine," said Jack, "that's mighty good of you." So eager was he to get away with Bob and Frank that he had given no thought as to what he should do with his plane.

Thereupon, with a brief word of farewell, the three sallied off arm in arm, Jack in the middle, toward where a taxi waited to take them into Laredo.

"We'll see you all at dinner," called Bob.

His father nodded understandingly. When he saw the taxi whirl away in a cloud of dust, Mr. Temple turned to his companions with shaking head and twinkling eye.

"We really oughtn't to let them go out of sight," he said. "If they don't get into mischief, it'll merely be due to the fact that they're too busy talking. Well, come on, I've another taxi here, George, and we'll follow to the Hamilton Hotel and have dinner. Captain Cornell has consented to honor us with his presence."

The three men thereupon climbed into another taxi, and followed toward the town.

Mr. Temple's prophecy of resultant mischief was not fulfilled, however, for, aside from the fact that the room occupied by Bob and Frank looked as if a small cyclone had struck it, no damage had resulted from the reunion of the three inseparables. They were sprawled about the room in various stages of undress, sweltering in the oven-like heat, despite the coming of darkness and the whirling electric fan. And their tongues were going at such a great rate, as Jack attempted to put his comrades in touch with the mysterious happenings of recent days while they were informing him of the doings of themselves and other of his friends at Yale, that Mr. Temple put his fingers in his ears.

"Well, get it out of your systems, fellows," he

said. "And then spruce up. We dine in a half hour. Meet us in the dining room, and be sure to be on time."

When the boys entered the dining room of the hotel, they found the three men already there and seated at a table for six. The room was crowded, every chair taken. But the three empty chairs at their table had been turned down, and the head waiter had shooed away interlopers. All three youths had now filled out into big men, even Frank who was the slightest of the three. In their flannel trousers and lightweight blue serge coats, with fresh vivid faces, alive and eager, they made a pleasing sight. And many was the approving glance thrown at them by grizzled and tanned old-timers whom they passed on their way.

"Been duding up," said Captain Cornell, with a grin. He himself in his flyer's uniform made a distinguished figure.

The boys sank into the chairs pulled out for them, and conversation became general as the dinner progressed.

"What'll we do tonight?" asked Jack, as the dinner neared conclusion.

"How about seeing the sights?" proposed Captain Cornell, who apparently considered himself in the light of guide to the party.

"Of Laredo?" asked Jack. "Not much to see, I guess, is there?"

"No. Of Mex town—of Nueva Laredo across the line."

"What is there to see?"

"Oh," said Captain Cornell, "for one thing, a sight that has vanished from our own country—the open saloon. I gather that we are all teetotalers, but that needn't bother us. An occasional bottle of ginger ale will be our passport. Then, too, we can toss a little change to the dance hall girls for putting on their turns. And we can take a look at the gambling—take a whirl, too, if you desire. I remember once dropping a quarter in one of those machines and turning up a full house on the cards. Paid me five dollars," he concluded reminiscently.

"Golly," said Jack, eyes shining, "sounds like the Old West—just like the days of '49 in California."

"Yes, it is like the Old West—but with a difference," said Mr. Hampton. "The dance halls, saloons and gambling houses of the Old West were operated for the recreation of a stern and hardy breed of men. Those of Nueva Laredo, like those of Juarez, Mexicali and Tia Juana, however, are operated mainly for the American tourists who roll across the Line in their motor cars. I'll tell you,"

he added, "I've gone slumming so often that I don't care about it. But you boys may as well see what things are like, and if Captain Cornell consents to pilot you I don't see why Temple and I shouldn't be permitted to stay here and take things easy."

Mr. Temple nodded, a look of relief in his eyes.

"I'll tell you, George," he said, confidentially, "Bob and Frank have been a trial to me. If I can get away from them for awhile, I have no objection to letting Captain Cornell assume the responsibility."

The young army flyer laughed.

"I'm afraid I'll be a poor chaperone," he said. "But I'll do my best." And he rose.

The others pushed back their chairs and rose, too. As they moved toward the door, a voice hailed Captain Cornell from a side table, and he spun about to find a huge sun-burned and grizzled man in flannel shirt and cowboy boots rising to greet him, showing two big revolvers at his hips as he stood up. They talked a moment or two, the big man's voice booming and Captain Cornell's lower-pitched, the words of both indistinguishable.

After a good look at the flyer's companion, the party moved on toward the lobby where presently they were rejoined by Captain Cornell.

"That was Jack Hanaford of the Rangers," he said. "We fellows of the Border Patrol work to-

gether with them a good deal. Jack has been famous along this Border for forty years. Said he understood that after tonight Uncle Sam is going to close the International Bridge at 9 o'clock at night, after which hour any Americans in Nueva Laredo will have to stay there until the next day. So this will be your last chance to see what Mex town is like at night, because you'd be hardly likely to care to spend the night there."

"Why is that?" asked Mr. Temple.

Mr. Hampton was about to answer but Captain Cornell forestalled him.

"To cut down this business of Americans going across the Line and making a wild night of it," he said.

Mr. Hampton nodded. It was the answer he himself had been about to propose.

"Come on, then," said Jack. "Let's hurry. If the word is generally known, it's likely to be a big night at Nueva Laredo, isn't it?"

"Quite likely," agreed Captain Cornell. "Excuse me a minute, while I order a taxi." And he stepped to the desk.

While he was absent, Mr. Temple with a look of some anxiety lectured the youths on the necessity for avoiding trouble in Nueva Laredo.

"Oh, Dad," said Bob, a bit impatiently, "we'll be all right. Nothing is going to happen. Why, it'll

be just like Coney Island. Besides we're able to take care of ourselves."

"Huh." Mr. Temple snorted. "Why, even while I've been looking at you, you've gone and got into trouble that took you a year to shake off."

There was a general laugh. Then up came Captain Cornell to bear the youths away.

"Taxi's waiting," he said. "Well, good-bye. Look for us around midnight."

But at the door he paused in sudden thought. "Tell that taxi to wait a bit, fellows," he said. Frank obediently crossed the sidewalk and told the driver of the rickety vehicle to wait for them. When he returned a conversation was going on which informed him that Captain Cornell had decided to doff his uniform before entering Mexico.

"We're about of a size, Captain," Bob was saying. "Come on." And he bore him away.

Frank turned to Jack for an explanation and was informed Captain Cornell had decided not to wear his uniform because it would bring undue notice in Mexico and might induce some rowdy to start a fight.

The others returned in a very short time, the flyer attired in a companion suit to Bob's, and then climbing into the taxi all four set out for the International Bridge.

"I thought I was big," Captain Cornell said to

Bob, "but you're bigger. Certainly the coat isn't too tight." And he flexed his arms. "Well, here we are."

As he spoke the taxi nosed out upon the bridge, going at a snail's pace and stopping alongside of the first official. A number of other similar stops were made, in order to satisfy a variety of officials, both American and Mexican. Then they rolled off upon a narrow, rough, unpaved street lined with little saloons. They were open-front establishments, and from them came a glare of light and a blare of noise. Up and down the sidewalks, under wooden canopies, pushed and serged a noisy crowd. Taxis and private cars sped recklessly up and down or shot from side streets at dizzying speed.

"Whew," said Jack, "you know you're in a foreign country all right."

"Good-bye, Uncle Sam," cried Bob gaily, looking back and waving his hand. Then a cry of alarm burst from his throat, he leaped to his feet, and the next moment was hurled into Jack's lap as the taxi was struck from the rear with a sickening crash and went careening drunkenly across the uneven roadway to end up against an iron pillar supporting a sidewalk canopy.

CHAPTER VII.

DON FERDINAND AGAIN

CAPTAIN CORNELL was first to emerge from the taxi which had lost its left front wheel in the impact against the pole and canted downward like a ship sinking by the head. He emerged as if shot from a cannon, for the crazy door had been wrenched open by the shock, and he had been tossed through the aperture. Alighting on hands and knees, he quickly got to his feet and turned to see how his companions fared.

"Anybody hurt?" he sang out, peering inside.

From the heap, three muffled voices filled with various degrees of mirth answered that their owners were not in desperate straits, and he experienced a sense of relief. Any or all of his charges well might have been seriously injured. But as he saw them struggling to untangle themselves, he grinned through a split lip caused by his face brushing the sidewalk.

"Lucky for me," he thought. "Wouldn't have dared face their fathers."

Then he felt someone plucking his sleeve and whirled about. A mixed crowd of Mexicans and tourists drawn by the crash hemmed him in, and over the heads of the crowd he could see several be-spangled dance hall girls from a nearby resort standing on tiptoe to behold.

The tug came from his taxi driver.

"Hey, you hurt?" asked the flyer, rubbing futilely at the smudged knees of his—or, rather, Bob's—white flannels.

"Naw, except lost a little breath," said the latter, a hardened night hawk. "Wheel stopped me," he added. "But, say, who pays for this? If you don't wanta pony up yerself, better help me ketch the old hombre what rammed us. There he goes."

He pointed to a high-powered, long-snouted touring car of midnight blue, with shining German silver trimmings, gleaming in the street. A uniformed driver had just finished inspecting his car for possible damage, and was climbing back to the driver's seat. From the rear, a shrill voice in broken English shrieked adjurations to the chauffeur to hurry.

"Old billy goat in the back's all excited," explained the jehu. "Been a-chasin' somebody, I gather, an' rammed us in 'is hurry. Payin' no attention to us."

"Here, that won't do. We want an explanation, anyhow," declared the army flyer, firmly.

"Wait here, I'll be back," he said.

And thrusting aside several Mexicans who stood in his way, he made a run for the big car just as it got into motion. The crowd stared in astonishment. One or two tourists raised a cheer. The jehu leaned on his tilting taxi with a sour grin riding his features. Bob emerging from the taxi at that moment, one hand raised to caress a considerable-seized bump on his head, saw Captain Cornell make a flying leap and land on the running board of the other car, just as the chauffeur picking up speed stepped on the gas and it leaped ahead.

"Hey, where you goin'?" yelled Bob.

But if any reply was vouchsafed by the doughty flyer, the speed with which the big car got under way neutralized it. Bob made a step forward into the street in astonishment, but the jehu's hand on his arm arrested him.

"Easy, pal," said the latter. "I wanta be paid for me damage. Stick around."

Bob laughed. "You'll be paid. Don't worry. But where did Cap—where did our friend go?"

The jehu explained. Frank and Jack, little worse for the accident, with the exception of minor body bruises, joined Bob on the sidewalk, and likewise received the benefit of the explanation.

"Old fellow was in a tearin' hurry to git some body seems he was a-chasin', far as I could make out," said the jehu.

"Well, Cap'll be back," laughed Bob. "Nothing to do but wait." He gazed at the crowd surrounding them, half a hundred or more, and sighed. "Worse than Fifth Avenue," he said. "I guess any time an accident happens, no matter where it is, a crowd gathers."

The crowd parted to make way for a Mexican policeman, swarthy, medium-seized, heavy-mustached, swinging a long nightstick and with the handles of two six-shooters protruding at his sides. He started to question them haltingly in broken English, but at his first words Jack addressed him in Spanish. The policeman's face lighted up, and he nodded violently as Jack continued in a voice so low that the crowd could not hear. Then he turned and with voice and club-thrust began to scatter the crowd.

The tourists seeing the show was over, so to speak, turned away, and the Mexican barflies shuffled off. Finally, the crowd was dispelled, and the policeman returned and Jack shook hands with him gravely, only a slight twitching at the corners of his mouth betraying to his companions that he nursed a secret sense of amusement. Then, swinging his stick in a jaunty salute, the policeman made

off with a "Mil' gracias, senor," to which Jack responded with "Buenos noches."

"How much d'ye give 'im?" asked the jehu, leering wisely and spitting into the street.

Jack was inclined to resent the familiarity, but shrugged and replied:

"Five dollars."

"Huh." The jehu shrugged. Then he straightened out of his slouch as his roving eye caught sight of something in the street, and he pointed. "Say. What d'ye know? Bringin' him back."

The boys gazed in the direction indicated. There rolling up behind them was the big car which had bumped them and which had been boarded by Captain Cornell. They turned to it eagerly, as it rolled to a halt at the curb. Then the biggest surprise of all greeted them, for out stepped first Captain Cornell and after him an even more familiar figure—at least to Jack. The latter could hardly believe his eyes. He halted a moment in astonishment, then sprang forward with a cry of:

"Don Ferdinand."

"You know this hombre?" demanded Captain Cornell, eyes popping.

Don Ferdinand, for he it was, stared a moment, then threw himself at Jack. Throwing his arms about the big fellow, he clapsed him with Latin exuberance, then backed off.

"If you are acquainted with this man, Senor Jack," he said excitedly, pointing to Captain Cornell, "tell him I will pay for any damage, but he must let me go. It is necessary. Ah, alas, though," he groaned, "I fear it is now too late. That devil has escaped again,"

Jack was bewildered. Finding Don Ferdinand here, in Nueva Laredo, when the last heard of him he had disappeared from his home! All he could do was to stare in astonishment. But Don Ferdinand who had spoken to Jack in Spanish was wringing his hands in despair. Jack could not understand why.

Bob and Frank, who had not seen the old Spanish aristocrat for a number of years, had been slow to recognize him. But the conversation and Jack's use of the older man's name brought back recollection. They crowded forward and greeted him. He seemed like a man in a daze.

Then understanding suddenly came to Jack. Don Ferdinand had declared "that devil has escaped again." The light dawned. He had been chasing that fellow in pursuit of whom he had left home and gone to the mine. What was his name? Ramirez! Yes, Ramirez, that was it!

"Was it Ramirez, Don Ferdinand?" he demanded eagerly, elbowing Bob aside to face his friend.

"Ssh." Don Ferdinand put his finger to his lips.

"Too late," he said, low-voiced. "He has escaped me. But let us not talk about it here. Come, get into my car. But first I'll pay this gentleman for his taxi," he said, pulling out a wallet. "Only," he added glaring at Captain Cornell, "he is a violent man. He put a revolver into my face and commanded me to order my driver to return here."

"Sorry," apologized the flyer. Remembering his conversation with Jack at the ranch regarding Don Ferdinand and his trouble at the mine with "that devil Ramirez," he also was putting two and two together out of the conversation between the old aristocrat and Jack.

"Oh, I say, you two must be friends," declared Jack, proceeding to introduce them. "As for the damage to the taxi—" And leaving the sentence unfinished, he reached for his own wallet.

But Don Ferdinand forestalled him. He thrust into the jehu's hands a sheaf of bills the size of which made the latter's eyes bulge.

"Is that sufficient?" he snapped in English.

The taxi bandit made a grotesque bow.

"For that price," he said, "the ol' boat's yourn."

Don Ferdinand never even smiled, but beckoning the four young fellows to follow, climbed into his car. Bob and Frank hung back, whispering. Then, just as Jack was about to enter behind Don Ferdinand, they halted him.

"Say, Jack, we haven't seen anything yet of the town," explained Frank. "And we'd like to. No use running away when we just came. As for the taxi we can always get another to take us back across the Bridge, I guess. Explain to Don Ferdinand, and then let the four of us knock around as we intended to do."

Jack considered, turning to Captain Cornell with a question in his eyes. The latter nodded. He was young enough to enjoy a sightseeing tour and, since they had all escaped unscathed from the crash, saw no reason to return with their original purpose unfulfilled.

So Jack explained the situation to Don Ferdinand, adding that they were staying at the Hamilton Hotel on the American side of the River, with Mr. Hampton and Mr. Temple. He urged that Don Ferdinand, if he intended to return across the River, call on those two older men—both of whom were friends.

"Tonight I cannot, Jack," said Don Ferdinand. "I am staying with friends who expect me. This is their car. But tomorrow I shall give myself the pleasure of calling upon you."

"Good," said Jack. "But"—as an afterthought—"come to the hotel before three o'clock tomorrow afternoon, as we all would like to come back here to see the bull fight."

The old Don agreed to do so. Then with a bow all around, he gave the word to his chauffeur, and the latter pulled out into the street, backed and headed for the International Bridge.

Jack stood at the curb, gazing thoughtfully after the departing car.

"Now I wonder what brought him here, and I wonder about this mysterious Mr. Ramirez," he said.

He had told Bob and Frank before dinner about the mysterious events transpiring at Don Ferdinand's mine and about the latter's disappearance. Captain Cornell likewise knew. So Jack's remark was understood.

"Well, we'll find out tomorrow," said big Bob, stretching. "Come on, lads. Let's saunter a bit and take in the sights. There's a hot dog stand just ahead here, and I'm hungry enough to eat a kennel. That little bounce seems to have given me an appetite. Step up, me byes, and order your dogs, with mustard or without."

CHAPTER VIII.

"IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS."

SLEEPY-EYED still after their late hours of the night before, the boys met at a belated eleven o'clock breakfast in the dining room of the hotel next morning. While they were dressing the Sunday morning church bells had been ringing in their ears. At the table, Bob reported that his father and Mr. Hampton had departed to attend church services.

"Tried to get me to go along," said Bob, who was first of the boys to arise, "but I wanted to wait around for you fellows."

Truth to tell, Bob had had a hard time persuading his father that it would be all right for them to attend the bull fight in the Mexican town across the Border that afternoon. Mr. Temple was what would be termed an old-fashioned man. To him attendance at a bull fight under any circumstances was to be frowned on. And Sunday attendance was little short of a sin. However, the youths were now at the age of discretion, he pointed out, and could do as they pleased. Bob had pointed out that, inasmuch as bull fights were not held ex-

cept on a Sunday, this would be their only opportunity to behold one. Then the matter had been dropped.

"Well, that was some night," said Jack, between bites of grape fruit. "Wonder when Don Ferdinand will show up and, likewise, what sort of story he will have to tell."

"It ought to be exciting," said Frank. "Think of your finding him here, on the trail of that fellow —what's-his-name?"

"Ramirez," said Jack. "I can't get over the feeling, fellows, that we're in for a bit of excitement through our acquaintance with Don Ferdinand."

"Aw, shucks," yawned big Bob, stretching his arms widely. "Nothing'll happen. Nothing ever does happen."

Frank looked at him, grinning. "You mean to say nothing ever happens to us?"

"That's my story," said Bob, "and I'll stick to it. Oh, we've had a few little adventures in our lives, but that day's gone. What's there left? Now that we've graduated, we'll have to settle down in business. Pretty soon some girl'll come along and marry us, and then we'll be raising families and paying taxes and pew rent. Then we'll be getting fatter and fatter, and pretty soon some kid'll say: 'Him? Oh, he used to be in the backfield for Yale—but that was a long time ago.'"

Jack and Frank gazed in amused astonishment at their big comrade, and then as if with one accord burst into a hearty laugh. Bob's drooping expression did not change, however.

"Laugh, doggone ye," he said. "But Dad's been talking to me like a father this morning. Said last night's little ruckus convinced him I ought to come to my senses and settle down. First thing you know, I'll be sitting in an office and learning the export trade. No, I mean it. Nothing's ever going to happen to us again—to me, anyhow."

A bellboy came through the lobby calling. He poked his head in the doorway, looked around, saw only the three at table, and was about to withdraw, but thought better of it. Maybe the man he wanted was in that group. He'd give one call, anyway.

"Mis-ter Hamp-ton," he droned. "Mis-ter Hamp-ton."

"Hey." Jack leaped startled to his feet. "What is it?"

The bellboy advanced, holding out a telegram in a yellow envelope.

"Must be for your father," suggested Frank.

Jack took it and read the typewritten superscription. "No, it's for me."

He handed the bellboy a tip, and the latter turned away. Then Jack slit open the envelope, drew out the telegram and read it. The next moment, he

whirled to his companions, throwing the message down on the table between them.

"Hum. Read that. Then say nothing exciting is going to happen."

With quickened interest, Bob and Frank put their heads together and bent to read. This is what they saw:

"Do not look for me today. Important developments. Thousand pardons.

"F."

They looked up puzzled.

"F. must be Don Ferdinand," said Jack. "Now d'you see?"

"All I can see is that he says he can't be here," said Bob.

Jack punched him disgustedly. "Wake up, Bob. If important developments have occurred, it can only have to do with this fellow Ramirez. Don Ferdinand was after him last night, when he smashed into our taxi and was so delayed that he lost him. Now the old fire-eater has got track of Ramirez again and is going after him."

"Well, what's that got to do with us?" grumbled Bob, whose pessimism this morning was too deep to be quickly dispelled.

"Oh, Bob, don't be so gloomy," said Frank, his quick eager face alight "Jack's right. I seem to

smell excitement, and I'm sure that we're going to get into it some way."

"That's the way I feel, too," said Jack. "Something's going on, something big, or else old Don Ferdinand wouldn't be here. He's trailed Ramirez more than two hundred miles—probably on horseback. He had a dozen armed men at his back when he started. Probably they're somewhere around. Something's going to happen. I don't know what. I can't even guess. But I'll bet we get into it. Come on, you've finished breakfast. Let's get outside and get some air."

Pushing back their chairs, the others rose and followed him into the lobby. As they started for the elevator in order to ascend to their rooms and get their hats preparatory to taking a stroll about Laredo, Captain Cornell espied them. He was in civilian clothes—but this time, his own. Crossing the lobby he joined them, and all four went up to the sitting room of their suite.

Jack told the flyer of Don Ferdinand's telegram, advancing his explanation of it.

Captain Cornell displayed a quickened interest.

"Told you I was going to try and find out something about this fellow Ramirez," he said. "Well, this morning I bumped into Jack Hanaford on my way here. Nobody knows anything about Ramirez, out at the field, by the way. But Jack's an

old-timer. Used to be a Ranger. He's the same man who told me last night that the government was about to close the International Bridge at nine o'clock at night hereafter.

"'Ramirez?' said Hannaford, 'Ramirez?' He looked thoughtful. 'Would he be a little fellow now, with blue powder burns on the left cheek an' a hooked nose like a poll parrot an' a limp in 'is right leg?'

"I laughed. 'How do I know what he looks like when I've never seen him?'

"'Yes,' said Jack, not one bit phased by my remark, 'yes,' that would be him. An' what would ye be after wantin' with Ramirez? He's a bad hombre.'

"'I gathered that much,' I said. 'But I don't want to find him. Somebody else does, though. So he's a bad hombre, Jack? How bad? Is he a Mexican revolutionist?'

"'Revolutionist?' snorts Hannaford. 'No, he ain't no petty bandit callin' himself a General. He's a bigger crook than that. Why, he's the biggest crook on the Border by all odds. Government's been after him for twenty years, but never could get the goods on him. You know all about him. Why d'ye ask me?'

"'Crook?' said I. 'How come, Hannaford?'

"'Smuggler,' said he.

"Then I did get excited, fellows. It all came back to me. I remembered the name. When you first mentioned it, Jack, back there at your home it sounded familiar. But like you I got to thinking of revolutionists. That put me off the track. So now I said to Hannaford, 'Look here. You mean the Master Mind?'

"Hannaford snorted again. 'Yeah, that's what the newspapers call him. But he ain't any Master Mind. He's just a doggone smart crook. But he'll get his some day. I only hope it's on this side of the Line, so I can get a crack at him. His gang croaked my old side-kick, years ago. Just the same, you'll have to admit he is smart. Why, he fools you boys of the Border Patrol in your airplanes just as easy as he used to fool us when we chased him on horseback. He's smuggled everything from Chinamen to diamonds in his time. What he's up to now, I don't know. You're the first that's mentioned him in a year.'

"So then I asked Jack if that was true, if he hadn't heard any rumors of recent activity on the part of Ramirez, and he said he hadn't. We talked a little more, and then I came on here. Thought this much would be interesting, anyhow, and that your friend Don Ferdinand might complete the picture. Now here you get a telegram which as good as says he's on Ramirez's track

once more. Nothing to do but wait I guess."

And the flyer subsided.

He had contributed real news, however. And their plans for a stroll forgotten, the four talked on until the subject had been exhausted.

Then the conversation turned to Jack's radio experiments, and Captain Cornell, who was really interested despite his humorous lamentation that he couldn't understand anything at all about the subject, asked numerous questions which Jack was kept busy answering.

Presently, acting on a sudden thought, Frank got up and unlocked a trunk. Delving into it, he reappeared with a small square box. This he placed on a table with an air of triumph, and throwing open the lid stepped back, gesturing like a showman, and said: "Behold."

"Looks like some kind of a radio set," said Jack, examining the contents. "And here, strapped in the lid, is a head-piece. Looks like radio, tastes like radio, must be radio. What is it, Frank?"

"It's just what you said. Only it's a trick set. Had a little time last Winter, and got to playing with an idea. Here, I'll show."

And carefully removing the whole business from the box, Frank proudly held it up for inspection.

"Why," said Captain Cornell, "it looks like some kind of a belt."

"And that's just what it is," declared Frank. "It's a radio receiving set for hikers. It contains three 'peanut' tubes, Jack. See? And A and B batteries. I snap it around my waist. Like this. See?"

There it was. A complete receiving set. Around the bottom of the broad belt ran a shelf bracketed at right angle, and on it were the batteries, the three little tubes, and the various dials.

"Here," said Frank, pointing, "I hook on the head-phone. As for aerial, this little loop turns the trick." Lifting out what seemed to be the bottom of the cabinet, he disclosed a tiny loop beneath, laid in a shallow drawer. "And, Jack, you think you're some punkins with your experiments in long-distance receptivity. Well, how far do you think I can receive?"

"I give up," said Jack, laughing. "How far?"

"Two or three hundred miles," Frank replied. "Pretty good, eh, what?"

"Certainly is," said Jack. "Let me try it. Maybe, someone is broadcasting now."

"No use," said Frank. "I took a look at the local paper this morning and read the broadcasting program. Nothing on until 4 o'clock. And by then we'll be at the bull fight."

"All right," said Jack. "Take it along, and we'll try it there. I want to know whether it'll work.

If it does, we ought to get some fun out of it."

Frank promised to do so, and the set was replaced in the box. Then Mr. Hampton and Mr. Temple returned, and the matter was forgotten in the more important matter of explaining Don Ferdinand's telegram and repeating what Captain Cornell had learned about Ramirez from the former Ranger.

"Hope nothing has happened to my old friend," said Mr. Hampton thoughtfully. "Didn't give the address of the friends he's staying with, did he, Jack? No? Well, we can't look him up there, then. Some rich Mexican family living on the American side of the Border, I suppose."

"Must be rich, all right," agreed Captain Cornell. "That car and the liveried chauffeur both spelled ready money."

"Well," said Mr. Hampton, "nothing for us to do then except to wait. We'll hear from Don Ferdinand sooner or later. But I do hope he doesn't endanger himself, if only for the sake of his daughter." He looked sidelong at Jack, but the latter appeared elaborately unconscious of this mention of Rafaela. "Well," sighed Mr. Hampton, then, "I hate to appear to be getting old, but this heat certainly makes me feel sleepy. Run along, you fellows, until time to go down into Nueva Laredo. I'm going to take a nap."

CHAPTER IX.

THE BULL FIGHT

"Better come with us, Temple."

Face beaded with perspiration because of the steaming heat, Mr. Hampton stood by the bed on which his companion, partially disrobed, had thrown himself. The draught created by the electric fan blew across him. Mr. Temple shook his head.

"Not for a million dollars," he said. "I'm fairly comfortable here, and I know I wouldn't be so at the bull fight. Besides, you know what I think of bull fights."

Mr. Hampton nodded. He was well aware that his friend frowned upon the proposed jaunt into Mexico that afternoon.

"I know," he said. "But we can't forbid the boys to go. They're too old for that. Besides that's not the way to inculcate principles, anyhow. Furthermore, you have the wrong idea of bull fights, in a way. To these Mexicans a bull fight is just the same as a baseball game to Americans.

Remember, I know the Latin temperament." He paused, looking down a moment, thoughtfully, at his companion. "The boys are young, Temple. When we were their age, the prospects of a bull fight would have appealed to us, too. Well"—turning with a resigned sigh toward the door—"it certainly doesn't appeal to me, but I reckon I shall have to go along."

And once more wiping his perspiring face, Mr. Hampton went out, closing the door behind him.

He found the three youths and Captain Cornell awaiting him in the steaming lobby, and all four went out and climbed into a waiting taxi, whence they proceeded toward the International Bridge.

Other automobiles were streaming across the Bridge. The bull fight was to be of more than customary interest, for two famous matadors were to display their prowess in opposition to each other. One was Juan Salento, idol of Mexico, and the other, Estramadura, famous Spanish matador, who, fresh from triumphs in Madrid, was touring Mexico.

Through the crowded, dusty, ill-paved streets of Nueva Laredo went the taxi. The crowd grew denser. On the sidewalks, a pushing, jostling, eager mass of Mexicans with a thick sprinkling of Americans. Boys running in the streets, barefoot, ragged, dark, darting in and out between auto-

mobiles. Several times the hearts of the party were in their mouths as little shavers seemed to escape being run over merely by a hair's breadth. Motor cars shot by them or darted from side streets with reckless disregard, but fortunately no accidents occurred, although time and again the members of the party expected to hear sounds of a crash.

As they neared the huge amphitheatre, Captain Cornell ordered the taxi driver to drive to the shady entrance.

"On the shady side it costs four dollars a seat," he said. "On the sunny side it costs two. A big difference—but it's worth it."

They disembarked, passed through the gate in the middle of a swarming crowd, and then mounted to the topmost tier of seats.

Under the midafternoon sun the huge ampitheatre was literally baking. Heat waves shimmered above the sandy arena in the middle. Yet more than ten thousand people were already seated in the banked-up tiers of seats, while others were crowding up by every stairway.

"Look at the colors," commented Jack. "I didn't know there were that many in existence."

The peons on every hand were, in truth, arrayed as the lillies of the field—in the most gorgeous raiment they possessed. They were out to make holi-

day, and they were dressed for the part. The tiers, under the glaring sun, looked like a vast flower display.

While the others were busied gazing here and there upon the strange and unfamiliar scene, and laughing at the many laughable incidents which kept constantly coming to their attention, Frank quietly went about a certain task. He had brought with him his receiving set on a belt. He opened up the box in which it was arranged, took it out, buckled it on, adjusted the headphones, and then hooked up to the little loop aerial. Sitting as he did on the top row of seats, with none behind him, and flanked on either side by other members of his party, he was unobserved by outsiders.

Jack and Bob on one side, Captain Cornell and Mr. Hampton on the other, were all craning forward, gazing at the scene below, and paying him no attention.

For a little while, until his adjustments were made, Frank fiddled with the dials. Then, assured that everything was in good working order, he leaned back, preparing to listen to whatever was in the air.

Presently Jack looked around as if to address some remark to him and for the first time noticed what Frank was doing. He began to laugh.

"You're a fine one," he said. "Coming to a bull

fight, and paying it no attention, but preparing, instead, to listen in on some broadcasting program. Hear anything?"

Frank took off the headphone.

"No," he said, in a disappointed tone, "there isn't a thing in the air except some Morse. And I'm so rusty, I can't make it out. Want to listen?"

Jack stretched out a hand to take the headphones, but at that moment Bob plucked his sleeve.

"Here they come, fellows. Look."

Both youths lost any further interest in radio as they gazed into the arena below.

"That's Estramadura, the tall one in red," explained Captain Cornell, pointing. "And the little fellow in yellow is Juan Salento. Listen to the yells."

Wild cheering broke from the stands as the procession made its preliminary circle of the arena. First came the two famous matadors. They were followed at a little distance by the eight toreadors, marching four abreast. Four picadors on horseback followed, blunt spears erect. Last of all came a boy driving a team of mules. And in all the world there was nobody so swollen with importance as that boy.

Laughingly, Mr. Hampton called attention to the lad.

"His job is to haul out the dead bulls," explained

Captain Cornell. "Every Mexican boy in the audience would give his right eye to be in that boy's place. Many a famous matador has risen from just such an apprenticeship, and some day that boy may be the idol of the populace. Who knows? Certainly, you can count on it that he thinks he'll become a great man some day. Probably, he has a wooden sword, and practices the matador's strokes continually."

Before the box occupied by the Mexican general commanding the garrison, the matadors made their bow. Then the boy with the two mules retreated, the picadors on horseback drew behind a barricade between the front tier of seats and the arena, the toreadors with their capes scattered about the arena, and Estramadura who was to kill the first bull lounged by himself with a bored air.

On the topmost tier of seats on the shady side, five Americans leaned forward almost as interested —yet not quite—as the thousands of Mexicans about them. All that had gone before was merely a flourish. The drama was now about to begin. Even the band, seated on a box near that of the commandant, ceased blowing its horns and thumping its drums.

A door in the fence opened.

A huge black bull charged into the arena.

A moment the black bull stood with head down,

nostrils quivering, eyes flashing. Then he charged —straight toward the nearest toreador. The man waited until the bull was perilously close, then flaunting his long cape in front of the charging animal, leaped nimbly aside.

The bull became more enraged. This way and that he charged. Toreadors whipped their capes across his eyes.

He became more accustomed to their tricks. The last three toreadors were so hard-pressed that they were compelled to seek shelter by leaping over the stout plank wall into the runway separating the lowest tiers of seats from the arena.

Hysterical yelps of laughter bespoke the tenseness to which the crowd was working itself up.

"Estramadura's turn now," shouted Captain Cornell to his companions, raising his voice in order to make himself heard above the sudden roar of applause.

The tall graceful Spaniard, clad all in red—red shoes, red stockings, red silk knee breeches, red jacket, with a broad yellow sash and jaunty, tricornered yellow cap, strolled lazily forth.

But he was not so lazy as his actions bespoke. Or, if lazy, was nimble. Not for him the shelter of working near the wall. He moved to the middle of the arena. The bull charged for him.

The three youths sucked in their breath.

Would he let himself be gored? How would he meet that charge? He was weaponless. The only thing he held in his hands was a voluminous red cape.

The matador flicked out the cape with the merest movement of his hands, as a boy flicks forth a marble. But that little movement sent the cape fluttering wide before the eyes of the bull.

Yet Estramadura did not budge. He seemed rooted in the sand. The bull bellowed, lowered his head, charged on.

By a sideways twist of his body, indescribably graceful, Estramadura avoided the nearest horn of the maddened animal by an inch, and the brute thundered on. The matador had not moved his feet.

A thunderous cheer shook the stands. Men leaped to their feet in a frenzy. Hats were flung into the ring. Money fell gleaming upon the arena sand.

Turning his back on the bull, Estramadura bowed. And as if their former efforts were but a mere warming-up process, the spectators released another volley of cheers far greater in volume.

The boys sat enthralled, uttering occasional ejaculations, not particularly intended to be heard and going unanswered.

"Look at that, will you?"

"Graceful as a snake."

"Some cheering, Bob. Beats the old football field."

The bull had turned, was coming back. Again Estramadura awaited him. Out whipped the cape, falling over the animal's head, turning him around for another charge. Estramadura did not shift his feet an inch.

Indescribably graceful he seemed, out there, under that blazing sun, every action etched on the retina of the onlookers. The bull charged again. Then Estramadura lifting his tri-cornered silk cap reached over and hung it on one of the animal's horns—without moving from his position.

It was the wildest kind of daring, the utmost display of skill. And in the yell of frenzied acclaim which went up was mingled many an American as well as Mexican voice.

Then, as if at a signal from the matador, a picador dashed forward on horseback, blunt spear leveled, and took and turned aside the bull's next charge. That gave the nearest toreador time to get into the game once more, and he diverted the animal with his cape.

"Hey, Captain," called Jack, leaning across Frank who intervened, "where's the matador going now—that daring fellow in red?"

Estramadura was moving toward the fence.

"He's going to get his sword," replied the army flyer. "Now he'll give the bull the coup-de-grace."

An attendant respectfully tendered the weapon on a cushion. Estramadura took it, bent it into an arch between his hands, then released the point and the weapon sprang back. Flinging his cape over the sword, the matador strolled gracefully back into the center of the arena.

Toreadors and picadors had left. Only the two opponents—the huge black bull and the slender figure in red—were left in the arena.

Once more the bull charged his tormentor, and now Estramadura essayed a manouvre which sent the stands into positive hysteria. Waiting until the animal was almost upon him, he turned his back nonchalantly, at the same time swaying to one side. And the bull went thundering by so close that it seemed he brushed the man.

Back he came. And Estramadura, tossing the cloak at length aside, stood with right leg advanced, right arm extended with the sword, measuring his stroke. He was like a great drop of blood against the yellow background of the sand. The sunlight on his blade turned it into a ribbon of fire.

The bull charged. One short sharp "Ah" of irrepressible excitment ran through the whole vast audience. Then silence.

This time Estramadura moved. He leaped aside and thrust downward through the shoulder. The bull fell as if stricken by a thunderbolt in mid career, and did not move. The matador's sword had pierced his heart.

Then while the stands literally went wild, and the peons, aristocrats and Americans thumped each other hysterically on the back, yelled themselves hoarse and vied with each other in tossing money into the arena, the three youths on the topmost tier looked at each other. Their faces were flushed, eyes shining.

"I thought a bull fight was a terrible sight." said Bob. "But could anything be more graceful or daring than that?"

Above the uproar Captain Cornell, leaning close, made himself heard. "You've seen the best in all Spain," he said. "That means, probably, the best in the world. The Mexican just can't be up to that."

But they did not get the opportunity to find out.

CHAPTER X.

RAMIREZ!

ESTRAMADURA was enjoying his triumph to the full. Bowing this way and that, a slender, graceful figure, looking in his red costume like a flash of fire against the sun-drenched yellow sands of the arena and the colorful stands beyond, he showed no disposition to retire so long as the ovation continued. And the hysterically delighted Mexicans apparently did not intend to subside so long as they had breath to cheer.

Minute after minute rolled by while the uproar continued and, if anything, grew in volume. All about and below the little group of Americans on the topmost tier of seats on the shady side of the arena were men and women who apparently had become temporarily insane. At least, so their actions would seem to indicate. They threw their arms about each other in true Latin abandon. They sent straw sombreros sailing out. Some fell in the arena, others on the heads of those below, and when the latter accident occurred it merely tended to

heighten the general excitement. Silver pieces of various denominations spouted up and out from the crowded stands to go whirling and sparkling in the sunshine and fall to the floor of the arena where Estramadura's attendants scurried hither and thither, retrieving this largess of his worshippers.

Doubtless, somewhere in the background waited Juan Salento, champion matador of Mexico. But he was not in evidence. And doubtless he was saying to himself that he would have to produce a sterling performance, indeed, in order to bear comparison with the daring and skill of this invader from Spain. But not a cry was as yet raised for him, not a voice as yet pleaded for a resumption of the program. The populace still thrilled to Estamadura's deeds.

"Won't they ever stop?" demanded Mr. Hampton of the army flyer. So tremendous was the tumult that, even though there was none behind them, and they were above the uproar, he had to bend close and raise his voice in order to make himself heard.

Captain Cornell started to make some laughing response, but while he was in the midst of it he felt a sharp tug of his arm. They were all standing up in order to see above the heads of those below them who likewise had risen to their feet and, in many cases had climbed upon the seats.

Turning he saw the tug had been given by Frank,

who was staring past him to attract Mr. Hampton's attention.

"Hey, what's the matter? The fight got you excited, too?" he demanded, noting the flush of excitement on Frank's cheeks and the glitter in his eyes.

"Jack wants you two to look. Down there, two rows below us and to the left."

Frank was shouting, although bending close to the pair on his right.

"He says that's your cook—what's-his-name—Ramon, Mr. Hampton. And he has an idea, Captain, that the man with him is Ramirez."

"Where? I don't see," cried Captain Cornell, staring.

But Mr. Hampton's eye had picked out Ramon, and in a word or two he directed the flyer so that the latter likewise saw.

Ramon was a true Mexican. Like his neighbors he had cast restraint aside under the fever engendered by the recent exhibition in the arena below, and he was standing up, cheering himself hoarse.

Having once located the old cook, the flyer's glance passed on to the man on Ramon's left. His gaze narrowed. Then he gave a sharp exclamation.

"D'you mean that's Ramirez?" demanded Mr. Hampton, who had been watching his companion.

"I don't know," confessed the flyer. "I never saw Ramirez. But I'd say that that man certainly

answers the description of the so-called 'Master Mind' which Jack Hannaford, the old Ranger, gave me. Blue marks on his cheek as if from powder burns and a nose beaked like a parrot's. If I could only see him walk now, and see whether he has a limp of the right leg!"

All five stared intently at the unconscious pair who continued to whoop it up along with the rest of their compatriots, as if they had no thought in the world except to do honor to the Spanish matador. But there is something compelling in the concentrated gaze upon the back of one's head of even one individual, something which frequently compels the object of such attentions to face the quarter whence the stare emanates. How much more compelling, then, if five persons fix their minds and thoughts upon one poor human target! It was so with Ramon.

Suddenly he faced about a puzzled frown on his features. His eyes roamed this way and that, as if searching. They passed unrecognizingly over the faces of the flyer and of Bob and Frank. But then they lighted up with recognition as they fell first upon Jack and then upon his father. With recognition and with something more. What was it? Fear?

At any rate, Ramon suddenly turned back, gripped his companion by an arm and began to address him. His words, of course, could not be heard by the

watchers above him, but that he was talking about them there could be no manner of doubt.

"By golly," exclaimed Jack, suddenly, leaning forward to call to his father. "He's recognized you and me. Duck, the rest of you. Let Ramirez see only us when he looks."

There was such a tone of command in Jack's voice that instinctively his listeners obeyed. They had only to sink back into their seats to be protected from the burning gaze of Ramirez by the figures of those standing up in their seats in the row between them, should the renegade turn around. And turn around he did, a moment later, thus justifying Jack's precaution.

Obviously unwilling to face again the gaze of the Hamptons whom he had left in the lurch when he deserted their desert household, Ramon, nevertheless, faced about along with Ramirez. That he did so at the latter's command was plain to be seen, for Ramirez gripped the older man by an arm. Ramon indicated his former employers, then dropped his gaze. Not so Ramirez, however, whose deep eyes stared boldly, insolently, as if he sought to engrave the features of the Hamptons in his memory.

Jack and his father withstood the scrutiny, which lasted only a moment, and, in fact, did a bit of staring in return. The face of the renegade was a

mask of evil. Once seen, it would not soon be forgotten, Jack for one felt assured. And he congratulated himself on his forethought in persuading his companions to drop out of sight before Ramirez turned that camera-like eye upon them. Otherwise Ramirez would have been able to recognize them all again. And Jack had a feeling that somebody was going to be needed to keep an eye on this fellow, as soon as the crowd in the arena broke up and they all took their departure.

That Ramirez would wait until the ending of the event he did not question. What was his surprise, therefore, to see the latter face about and, gripping Ramon by an arm, start to make his way through the crowded stand toward the nearest stairway exit.

Jack and his father looked at each other. Their thought was the same. Ramirez and Ramon should be followed. But for either of them to shadow the precious pair would be foolish, inasmuch as they were known. Somebody else, someone of their companions, would have to play detective, if the others were to be kept in sight.

The cheering continued. They were as much alone in that mass of frenzied Mexicans as if on a desert island, so far as any recognition of their presence extended. For Jack to have questioned his father would have been perfectly safe. Nobody

would have overheard who it was not intended should overhear. But spoken words were unnecessary. A question was asked and answered in glances alone.

Then Mr. Hampton bent down and addressed the flyer, acquainting him in a few brief words with the fact that Ramon and Ramirez were leaving.

"They know both Jack and me," he said, "so it would be useless for us to follow them. But I'm worried about my friend Don Ferdinand. These men may know something about him. At least we ought not to let them get out of our sight, if we——"

Captain Cornell did not wait for further words. He climbed up on the seat and prepared to make his way along it toward the stairway. A quick glance showed him Ramirez and Ramon attempting to thrust their way toward the same destination, and making heavy going of it because of the densely packed mass of humanity that intervened. Another swift appraisal brought out the fact that he would be able to reach the stairway well ahead of them, in all likelihood, inasmuch as all the occupants of the topmost row of seats were standing up, thus leaving the bench free for him to walk on, with no interference such as Ramirez and Ramon were experiencing from another row of persons above.

"Keep out of trouble," warned Mr. Hampton

anxiously, and the flyer laughed. "We'll be waiting at the hotel to hear from you."

As the Border Patrol man darted away along the bench, hastening so as to accomplish his purpose before the occupants resumed their seats, Bob who was the last in line of the party swung up behind him.

"The Army can't get all the fun," he chuckled, brushing aside the restraining hand which Jack instinctively thrust out to halt him.

A moment later he was too far away to be dragged back, and all his companions could do was to stare after him with mouths open in dismay.

"No, you don't, Frank," said Mr. Hampton suddenly, making a dive for Frank. The latter had attempted to climb up on the seat and set off in pursuit of his big pal.

"Come on, Mr. Hampton," begged Frank, "be a sport."

The older man shook his head.

"Two will be plenty for the job," he said. "I wish Bob hadn't gone, and I'd have stopped him if I could. I hope no trouble comes of it. And I suppose Bob will be all right, because Captain Cornell can get help by making his rank known, in case the necessity of an appeal to the Mexican police arises. Nevertheless, I won't be comfortable until I hear

from Bob and the Army man again. And I'd feel even more uncomfortable if you had gone, too."

"Oh, I say," protested Frank. "I can take care of myself as well as Bob."

"Yes, I know," answered Mr. Hampton. "The truth is you probably can take care of yourself better than Bob, that is you think a bit faster. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. But, there. Cornell and Bob, as you see, have reached the stairway and disappeared down it, while Ramirez and Ramon are still ten or twelve feet distant and held up by the crowd. That's good. Our boys will be able to wait for them outside, and should manage to follow them without arousing suspicion."

"I was thinking of Don Ferdinand, Dad," said Jack. "And so were you, I could tell. I wonder now whether Ramirez is really mixed up with the Don's failure to keep his appointment with us today?"

"I'd say he was," said Frank. "Remember that telegram spoke of 'important developments'."

Mr. Hampton nodded. "Yes, and that's why I thought it would be wise for Cornell to trail those two rascals. But I can't help wishing that Bob hadn't gone."

"Well, it's too late to be mended now," said Jack, practically. "There. Ramirez and Ramon also have reached the stairway. There, they have started,

down. It's a good thing Bob and Captain Cornell were so situated that they managed to get down first. It certainly will make matters easier for them."

Mr. Hampton nodded. "Yes, and a good thing they got away when they did, for, see, the crowd is beginning to subside at last."

The boys gazed below them at the stands. Many still shouted, but large sections were desisting and beginning to sink back into their seats. As for Estramadura, the matador, he had disappeared. The corpse of the slain bull likewise had been removed while their attention was otherwise engaged, without their having been aware of what was transpiring in the arena.

"Now I expect this other matador, the Mexican, Juan Salento, will have his chance to show his prowess," said Mr. Hampton. "Well, I suppose we may as well see it out. We'd have a hard time leaving now, anyhow, for once the next bull fight begins it would be much as our lives would be worth to try to pass in front of these fellows in making our way to the exit."

They resumed their seats, and Jack leaning over the parapet behind them searched the ground far below for signs of his companions or their quarry but without success. The exit was hidden from his view. Then he turned back to Frank and seeing the latter's woe-begone expression he burst into a laugh.

"Brace up, old thing," he said, slapping Frank on the back. "I feel just as bad about being left behind as you. But what must be, must. We'll have our chance yet, never fear. I feel in my bones that something is going on that spells action for us."

CHAPTER XI.

COMMANDEERED.

Bob and Captain Cornell bounded down the long stairway at a breakneck pace, but one which, fortunately, did not succeed in mishap, and emerging upon a rutted dirt roadway on the shaded side of the huge amphitheatre, paused to catch breath and take their bearings.

Through the lucky circumstance of having been on the topmost row of seats, they had been enabled to reach the stairway ahead of Ramirez and Ramon. They had brushed by the guard at the head of the stairs without that barefooted swarthy devotee of the bull fight even being aware of their departure.

The Army man was first to reach the outside, and he was taking a rapid survey of the surroundings when Bob came to a halt beside him. Big Bob was still chuckling over the neat way in which he had managed to take a hand in the adventure, knowing well that a moment more and Mr. Hampton would have laid on him an injunction to stay which

he would not have cared to disobey, and fully and keenly aware, besides, that right now Jack and Frank were filled with envy of him.

What they saw was a broad straggling roadway encircling the amphitheatre which stood on the edge of town. The last houses of Nueva Laredo lay to their left and some distance away, too far to afford cover in case they wanted to hide while spying on the movements of the two Mexicans who any moment would appear behind them.

Across the roadway, however, were parked hundreds of automobiles whose owners, Americans and Mexicans, were somewhere in the crowd watching the bull fight. Captain Cornell's roving glance fell on these cars, and he made a quick decision.

"Come on."

He raced diagonally toward the parked cars, running toward the right in order to get out of the range of vision of anyone descending the stairs.

First casting a quick glance behind him and noting that Ramirez and Ramon had not yet come into view, Bob followed. Captain Cornell ducked in behind the first of the cars, a disreputable member of a universally known family, and halted. Bob was hard on his heels.

"What now?" asked Bob, with a laugh.

Without waiting for the other's reply he ran an appraising eye over the parked cars. They pre-

sented a far different sight from an orderly automobile park in any American city, for they were scattered about the uneven hummocky surface of a sandy field in what looked like inextricable confusion. Nor were any caretakers in sight. As a matter of fact, all male human beings and a good many of the other sex who were anywhere near that amphitheatre were inside of it. Who cared to watch automobiles when he could watch a bull fight, instead!

At that moment a renewed outburst of cheering signalized the advent in the arena of the bull which Juan Salento would be called on to fight, and big Bob heaved a sigh.

"Golly, listen to that. Did we come out here on a wild goose chase? I don't believe those two rascals are going to appear, after all. And we'll go and miss the fight."

But hardly had he completed his lament than Captain Cornell's warning voice ordered him to stoop below the side of the car, and Bob crouched down. None too soon, if he wanted to escape being seen, for two figures emerged from the exit and stood looking about. There was no mistaking them.

Bob was too busy watching through eyes which just topped the side of the car that hid him from view, to talk. He wondered what they would do,

but was not long left in doubt. Apparently satisfied, after a long look behind him up the stairway, that he was not for the moment pursued, Ramirez started to cross the road.

He did not head directly toward the position where the two Americans crouched in hiding, but, instead, made an almost straight line from the exit. This enabled the two in hiding to keep the body of the car between them. Ramirez would reach the parked cars, however, not twenty-five feet away.

Captain Cornell did some rapid thinking. How to keep his quarry in sight would be a problem if, as he suspected, Ramirez got into his own car. The two Mexicans would drive off, and—

"Hey," whispered Bob, "if they have a car here, we'll be out of luck, unless—"

"Unless what?"

Unless we steal one and follow. This flivver right here isn't locked. And you can start her battery with almost any old key," said Bob.

"Good boy," approved the Army man. "We may have to do that very thing. Some poor devil would be out a car, but, of course, we could square that. And there's not much chance," he added, thinking fast, "that he'd discover his loss and start the police on our track before the end of the bull fight. By which time we ought to be all right, hey?"

"Wonder what's the matter now?" Bob whispered,

disregarding the other's remarks. He raised his head a trifle, cautiously, staring toward Ramirez and Ramon.

Captain Cornell did likewise.

The two Mexicans had halted in front of a car of midnight blue, long-snouted, with German nickel trimmings. It stood on the edge of the parked cars, indicating its owner had arrived early at the bull fight. Late comers had been forced to go farther along the road or to burrow deeper into the field. Here, with one foot on the running board and a hand extended to grasp the handle of the left front door, Ramirez paused and, facing about, appeared to be scolding his companion.

"He's certainly giving that old fellow, Ramon, fits about something," whispered Bob. "Wish I could hear what he's saying."

That a disagreement of some sort had arisen between the two Mexicans was plain. Old Ramon stood with hanging head, just out of reach of Ramirez, while the latter berated him in a voice too low for the words to carry to the eager ears of the two watchers.

Bob strained his ears to hear, but that Captain Cornell's thoughts were otherwise engaged was evidenced when he suddenly emitted a sharp exclamation under his breath, and then squeezed Bob's arm.

"Doesn't that car look familiar to you?" he demanded.

"Why, I don't know." Bob was puzzled. There was something vaguely familiar about the appearance of the big car beside which Ramirez stood, yet he could not identify what it was.

"Well, it looks familiar to me," said the flyer in an excited undertone. "That's the car your friend Don Ferdinand was riding in last night when he bumped us, or I miss my guess. Look again."

"Golly," breathed Bob, "you're right."

"You bet I'm right."

"But how—"

"Yes, how? How does this rascal Ramirez happen to be driving it today? Didn't Don Ferdinand say he was visiting friends and either tell us outright or else leave us to infer that the car belonged to those friends?"

"That's what."

"Well, then, how does Ramirez happen to be here in it? Say, young feller, this is certainly worth investigation. The plot thickens. I wonder—" The flyer suddenly ceased talking.

"Wonder what?" asked Bob, who did not take his eyes from the two Mexicans, and was interested to note that Ramirez had advanced threateningly toward Ramon who, in turn, had backed away.

"Why, I wonder if your friend, Don Ferdinand, really is playing a deep game, and is in cahoots with this Ramirez."

Bob shook his head. "Oh, that's a bit too thick, Captain, if you don't mind my saying so."

"Yes," admitted the Captain, "you're probably right. But what then? How account for that car?"

"I don't know. Maybe Don Ferdinand is in trouble, captured, killed." Bob's voice grew troubled. "He's such a reckless old firebrand. And this fellow Ramirez looks like a bad hombre."

"He is a bad hombre," said the Army flyer. "There." His hand gripped Bob's arm. "Look at that. By George, I can't let that—"

And without finishing his sentence, he whipped out his service automatic and would have darted into the open, but for the fact that Bob by main strength restrained him.

"Hold on, you hot head," said Bob. "He's putting up his gun already. Ramon is giving in. You sure would have spilled the beans." And he wiped his face, on which the perspiration had suddenly broke forth.

Captain Cornell looked a trifle shame-faced, yet defiant, as he slid his weapon back into its scabbard.

The little drama which had so roused him was over. Although unable to hear what was said be-

tween the two Mexicans, the watchers guessed at the meaning of the tableau which had just played itself out. Ramon apparently had been reluctant to accompany Ramirez further. The latter had argued. Then he had whipped out a revolver. It was this which had caused Captain Cornell to start to take a hand. But Ramirez had needed only to display his weapon. Ramon had yielded. Already he was in the front seat, and Ramirez was climbing to his seat behind the wheel.

"Hate to steal a car," said the flyer grimly, as Ramirez started his motor. "But I reckon we'll have to do it. Of course, we can find the owner later and square it with him. But Ramirez mustn't escape, with the fate of your friend, Don Ferdinand, undecided."

Bob nodded, his lips grimly compressed.

With a roar, the big blue car pulled out into the rutted road, and started away in the opposite direction from them—the direction toward town. So worn was the road that Ramirez apparently was keeping the car in low gear and not making much speed. It was that fact which decided Bob. There would be a possibility of keeping the fugitive in sight.

He vaulted into the flivver.

"I've got a key here that I think will switch on the juice," he said, bending toward the dash board

of the ancient vehicle. "You get around front, Captain, and crank her. No self-starter on this model. Must be the vintage of '76. Hurray," he shouted the next moment, caution forgotten, "the switch is on. Now give her a twirl, and look out for the kick."

Captain Cornell leaped to the front, seized the crank and began to spin it. One turn, two, without result. He cast a glance of dismay toward the disappearing car bearing Ramirez and Ramon away. Then he gave the crank another desperate turn. This time the response was instant. There was a sputter. Bob fed more gas. Then the engine broke into a roar, and the old car shook and rattled as if with ague.

"All aboard," sang out Bob, who was now in the grip of the spirit of adventure, and had cast scruples to the wind. They needed a car, and Captain Cornell was an American Army officer. They could commandeer this flivver, if they wanted to! While Bob was thus consoling himself, he was at the same time steering the car out into the road.

Captain Cornell leaped into place beside him, just as the big blue car rounded the distant curve of the amphitheatre.

"Give her the gas," shouted the flyer. "Let's go."

CHAPTER XII.

A HOUSE OF MYSTERY.

THEY went.

As Bob raced down the rutted roadway, there were only two thoughts in his head. Would they be able to keep Ramirez in sight? And would their commandeered car hold together? It creaked, groaned, squeaked, grated, whinned and wheezed, but—it covered the ground. And, gaining confidence in his vehicle, Bob opened the throttle to its fullest extent. The ancient car seemed to leap from ridge to ridge of the rutted road like a mountain goat jumping from crag to crag. And like the goat it made most amazing speed.

So much so, in fact, that when again Bob caught sight of the midnight blue car ahead, he had gained on it. His first question was answered. At this rate of speed he most certainly would be able to keep Ramirez in sight. In fact, he cut down his speed in order not to close upon Ramirez to the point where he might arouse the latter's suspicion.

Thus the two cars, parted by the length of a city

block, burrowed by means of the bumpy dirt streets deep into Nueva Laredo. The sun shone hot and dust, whirled up by a brisk wind and further stirred by their passage, settled upon them in choking clouds. Here and there some ancient crone slumbered in the open doorway of a hut, seeking the comparative coolness created by the draught of heated air through the doorway. But otherwise the streets were deserted. Everybody who could walk, crawl or ride had gone to the bull fight.

This way and that bounced Captain Cornell on the frayed seat beside Bob.

"Great guns, boy, take it a little easier, can't you?" he pleaded in gasps.

Bob clutched the wheel more tightly as a hole in the road almost twisted it from his grasp.

"Slow up and we'll lose 'em," he said.

The flyer groaned.

"Expect that's right," he managed to say between gasps. "Ouch. Have a heart. How are they getting away with this pace? That's what I'd like to know."

"Balloon tires on that baby," said Bob, "and snubbers. They're riding in a Pullman and—"

"And we're in a freight car," groaned the flyer.

"Don't find fault with the gift horse," laughed Bob, narrowly avoiding a particularly atrocious

hole with the front wheels of his chariot of joy only to flop into it with the rear wheels.

Captain Cornell almost bounced out of the car.

"Have a heart, Bob," he begged.

But Bob held grimly on. They were on the outskirts of the town now. For the last several blocks they had been driving through a particularly low quarter. The huts were of the poorest, being mere jumbled collections of shingles and tin or of 'dobe, with here and there a little patch of desert grass enclosed in a rickety picket fence before the more pretentious. As if satisfied with having done its worst, with that last dreadful jouncing given them, the roadway had become a little better. Bob was still keeping his distance of a block behind the leading car. He was wondering whether Ramirez and Ramon were aware of his presence behind them and, if so, whether their suspicions were aroused. He was likewise beginning to ask himself whether the chase would lead beyond the outskirts which now loomed ahead, the thinning out of the houses giving warning of approach to the open country beyond.

"If they lead us out into the country we'll be out of luck," he commented. "Don't know how much gas we have. Probably not much. That's always the way when you need it. We'd look fine, wouldn't we, if we got ten or twenty miles down

into Mexico and the old bus died on us? Besides, if we get out of town, they certainly will know we're following 'em."

"Uh-huh." Captain Cornell grunted. He was thinking along similar lines.

"Maybe, they're not suspicious of us yet, however," Bob said, as another thought came to him. "Notice we haven't turned any corners for blocks? Sticking to a straight road that way, it doesn't look so much as if we were following them. Might just be going the same way."

The car ahead slowed down before a two-story frame house on the right hand side, and halted alongside the wooden fence enclosing a small weed-grown plot of ground in front. The house stood in the next block. A street intervened.

"Turn right up this street," commanded Captain Cornell quickly, and big Bob complied without asking why.

At the same time he slowed down, but the flyer shook his head.

"Keep going until the next cross street, then turn left and we'll stop. That way, if they're watching us, we'll get out of sight. Then we can leave the car and sneak back to have a look from cover at that house."

Bob turned the next corner, finding himself in a street as deserted as any they had passed through,

and with only a few houses in the block. All were mere huts. Not a person, man, woman or child, was in sight. The only signs of life were a few chickens pecking dispiritedly at the ground under a drooping pepper tree in the shade of which Bob brought the car to a stop.

"Whew," he ejaculated, whipping out a handkerchief and wiping his streaming face. "That was what you might call a real joy ride." He climbed out and looked curiously at the springs of the old car. They were rust-covered but sound. Bob shook his head, marvelling. "How those springs stood it, I don't know," he said.

"Come on. Let's hurry," said the flyer. "We'll hike up to the next corner and then turn back toward the street we left them on. That'll put us beyond them and, unless they're watching for us, we ought to be able to spy on that house without much trouble."

Bob fell into step beside his companion and they moved along briskly despite the oven-like heat which brought out a profuse perspiration before they had taken a half dozen paces.

Turning the corner to the left, they saw open ahead of them a somewhat more pretentious street. At least, it possessed a plank sidewalk upon that side along which they proceeded, and the houses,

which were more numerous, seemed better built and the enclosures before them were better kept.

Captain Cornell's glance roving above the low line of the single-story 'dobe houses was quick to observe the rear of a two-story house on the intersecting street ahead, and he called Bob's attention with the remark:

"There's the house. Maybe, we can find a vacant lot ahead which will permit us to approach it from the rear."

But Bob paid little attention for at that moment he, too was noting something of interest—nothing less, in fact, than a lofty three-strand aerial of considerable extent in the rear of a small 'dobe house which they were approaching. As they drew abreast of the swinging gate in the picket fence which, for a wonder, was not a-dangle from only one hinge, but was neat and trim as were all the immediate surroundings of the place, a boy in his 'teens stepped to the door and glanced at them inquiringly.

Acting on impulse, Bob halted at the gate and, smiling at the lad, whose dark, olive-tinted face was bright and intelligent in expression, he pointed toward the aerial and asked in Spanish:

"Radio? You have a receiving set?"

"Oh, yes, senor," the boy replied, moving forward

a step or two, "but more than that, I send, too. I have a two-way station."

Captain Cornell had halted a step of two beyond Bob. No man on the Border Patrol could go long without acquiring a knowledge of Spanish, and as a matter of fact he had fluent command of the language. He understood, therefore, the nature of the remarks exchanged by Bob and the young Mexican lad, but he wasn't interested. His thoughts were taken up with the problem of how to approach the rear of that house of mystery without detection. So now he turned to Bob with a trace of impatience and said in English:

"Come on. We've got work to do."

Bob glanced aside so that the Mexican boy would not observe and winked by way of reply. Captain Cornell was mystified, he didn't understand. But he had a good deal of respect for his companion, little though he knew him, so he decided to hold his hand a moment until he could discover what Bob had in mind. For that Bob was up to something, he felt assured. He moved closer.

Bob laughed, leaning on the gate as if he had nothing in the world to do but exchange pleasant conversation with the Mexican boy.

"Radio certainly is fascinating," he replied in Spanish. "But I shouldn't have thought it would keep you from the bull fight."

"You are an American, senor, aren't you?" asked the boy, a trace of scorn on his features. "The senor speaks my language well. But I can tell. Well, that accounts for your mistake. Not all Mexicans are animals."

"Oh, here, here," cut in Bob, apologetically, "I didn't mean any harm. Why, I've just come from the bull fight myself, and I thought it mighty exciting."

The boy's expression became somewhat mollified.

"You see," Bob hurried on, anxious to overcome the bad impression he obviously had created, and still a bit puzzled as to just why the boy had taken offense; "you see," he said, "I, myself, am a radio enthusiast, and I know just how wrapped up in it a fellow can become."

"Oh," the boy moved closer. "The senor Americano will forgive my hasty temper. You see," he added, breaking into more hurried speech, "my mother is a widow who lets me do as I will in working with radio. But all her friends, they say' —and he shrugged—"they say she is foolish, touched in the head, to let me do so. They say, senor, that the good God did not want us to hear through the air for long distances or he would have equipped our ears. They say what I do is sacrilege."

He laughed with a touch of bitterness.

Bob was taken aback. He saw now why his remark about the bull fight had given offence. The boy was embittered against people of his own race. Poor kid, thought Bob, what a tough time he must have! Fortunately his mother supported him. Though how a Mexican widow, living in this poor quarter of the town, should possess enough money to enable her son to indulge his hobby was a facer.

While he still struggled mentally for a reply, Captain Cornell cut in with:

"Come on, Bob. They'll get away, maybe. Thought you had something up your sleeve! But just chinning this kid isn't getting us anywhere."

Bob saw he would have to inform his companion of what was in his mind, so he replied rapidly:

"Just a minute, Captain. What I wanted was to get the boy's interest and then ask him about that house."

"Oh." Captain Cornell saw the light, and his impatience in a measure abated.

"Well," said Bob, addressing the boy again, "my friend here is anxious to be gone, so I suppose I'll have to stop. I'd like to talk some more to you about radio, though. Maybe, some time, you'll let me have a look at your set."

"Oh, yes, senor," said the boy, all eagerness. "Right now, if the senor wishes."

"No," said Bob, "I'll have to be moving. By

the way, though," he added, letting his glance rove toward the rear of the two-story house on the next street, the upper windows of which could be seen above the low 'dobe adjoining the boy's home; "by the way, though, do you know who happens to live in that house?"

The boy stepped closer, in order to face about and see what place Bob was indicating.

"Oh, that house. Why, senor, it is somewhat of a mystery in this neighborhood. A Japanese gentleman lives there, and many Japanese come and go continually. But none of us has ever spoken to those people. The windows, as you see, are always shuttered."

He turned around to face Bob and drew closer. Instinctively, his voice dropped as he added:

"Every now and then there are many cars which come up there at night and then depart—nobody knows where. They are closed cars. And last night, senor, there was a scream, a terrible scream. I was sitting up very late at my radio, and had just gone to the door to get a breath of air. Then I heard it."

"Hey, Captain," said Bob, excitedly, turning to his companion, "hear that?"

CHAPTER XIII.

CAPTAIN CORNELL INVESTIGATES.

INDEED, Captain Cornell had heard, and he immediately moved into place at the gate beside Bob and began asking excited questions in Spanish. Was it a man or a woman who screamed? A man? Oh, and the Captain's face betrayed disappointment. Mere mention of the fact that a scream had shattered the midnight quiet in this remote quarter had aroused his sense of the romantic to a point where, with nothing else to go on, he had imagined the beginnings of a pretty mystery centering about a damsel in distress.

What a come-down to find not a woman but a man had screamed! Still he was an incorrigible romanticist. His imagination leaped to other possibilities. He shot other questions at the boy. There had been a fight, not so? Shots had been fired? The Mexican police had appeared on the scene?

But to all these questions the boy shook his head by way of reply. No, nothing. Only that first blood-curdling scream, such a scream as made the

hair stand on end. He, Juan Salazar, was his mother's sole defender. He had therefore not deemed it advisable to leave the house defenceless and go to investigate. And at that statement, both Bob and Captain Cornell found it difficult to repress their smiles. But they managed to do so and thus avoided giving the boy deadly offense. On the contrary, continued the boy, he had withdrawn indoors, barred the door and put out his light in order not to call attention to his house, in case—in case——

Captain Cornell came to the youth's rescue with a grave nod.

"That was the right thing to do."

"But, oh, the senor must believe me," said the boy. "It was a terrible scream."

Bob and the flyer looked at each other. "Couldn't have been Don Ferdinand," said Bob. "He didn't disappear until this morning. At least, it was only a few hours ago that we got his telegram."

"Mind reader," accused the flyer. "That's just what I was thinking of. But—then who was it?"

"Don't ask me," said Bob. And then a daring light came into his eyes. "What do you say to our making an investigation?"

"Huh. How?"

"Why—why—I don't know. How would you go about it? Just mosey up to the door and say to whoever comes: 'Who made that noise last night?' "

The flyer gave a short laugh. "We'd get far, wouldn't we?"

"Well, we might go up to the front door and ask to see Don Ferdinand. Just say we noticed his car in the street and dropped in to see him."

"Huh." The flyer grunted disgustedly. "You'll have to do better than that."

"Well, then, think of something yourself," said Bob. "What's the matter with that last idea, anyhow? We've got—no, by George, I haven't any weapon. But you've got your service automatic. I know, because you pulled it out back there outside the bull ring. We'd certainly take 'em by surprise, and something might come of it."

Captain Cornell shook his head pityingly. "You've been out in this sun too long, old man," he said.

While this semi-humorous conversation had been going on, the Mexican boy had withdrawn a short distance and stood with his hands thrust into his pockets and his eyes bent toward the ground in thoughtful contemplation. Now he looked up and glancing toward Bob said:

"The Americano might like to know that there is something strange about that house. I found it out by accident one day. On that street beyond"—pointing toward the lane on which the two Americans had abandoned their commandeered car—"there is a deserted house. It is only a poor sort of

place of 'dobe. But one day I saw a man come out of it, carefully, looking around as if to make sure he was not observed. So, then, I happened to pass that house later and, seeing that it was a time when nobody was in sight, I tried the door. It was open, and I went in. There, senor, I found a trap door which I opened. Beneath it were steps. I even went down them and found at the foot a tunnel. Senor, it was really none of my business, so I did not investigate farther. But that tunnel leads to the house of the Japanese."

"Hey? How do you know?" barked Captain Cornell.

Conscious that he held their interest, the boy regarded the flyer with a superior air. Then he unbent. What good was it to possess a secret, if you couldn't share it?

"Oh, senor, that is not difficult," he said. "The man who came out of the door of the little house was a man I had seen entering the house of the Japanese. He is of my race, and he has a crooked nose and a limp of the right leg. I could not be mistaken."

"Ramirez," ejaculated Bob, and Captain Cornell nodded.

"You know this man?" asked the boy quickly.

"Yes," said Bob hastily, "we know of him. He is a rascal."

As for Captain Cornell, he appeared to be lost in

thought. After a long moment he turned to Bob. "Well, we're on the track of something, that's sure. Let's walk up to the corner and see if the car we followed is still there. Then we can talk it over. Guess, we've learned all we can from this kid."

Bob nodded, and turning to the Mexican lad he again dropped a warm word about radio, promising to return some time and examine the boy's apparatus. The lad beamed, his earlier offended state forgotten. Then Bob and the flyer walked briskly toward the distant street intersection, a long block away.

"What do you make of this?" Bob asked. "This house owned by a Japanese—with lots of other Japanese there—people driving away at night—the secret passage—that scream last night?"

"I don't know," confessed the flyer. "I'm beginning to get the glimmerings of a vague suspicion. Not all we have learned, however, fits in with it."

"What is it?" pressed Bob.

"Not worth mentioning yet," said the flyer. "But here's the corner. Now for a look—see." And halting at the edge of a building on the corner, he peered around it and along the length of the thoroughfare down which they had jounced and jolted not long before.

Bob likewise stole a glance from shelter, chuckling as he did so.

"We must look like a couple of conspirators in a

melodrama," he said, "pussyfooting up to the corner and then poking our heads out this way. Good thing everybody's gone to the bull fight or we'd rouse somebody's suspicions and, maybe, have the place down about our ears. But there isn't a soul to see us. The place is like a village of the dead."

Little enough, however, was there to see. The long street was deserted as far as the eye could rove. It lay baking under the late afternoon sun, and the only object of interest anywhere apparent was what they had looked to find—the handsome car midway down the block.

"Calle Lebertad," read a battered and defaced street sign on a post on the opposite side of the street. Doubtless, a similar sign appeared on the post ahead of them on their corner, but, as it faced outward, they could not note it. Bob called the flyer's attention to the sign, remarking that at least they now knew what street the mysterious house stood on.

"A lotta good that does us," said Captain Cornell, slangily, in disgust. "I'd like to get closer to that house, Bob. I have a hunch we might overhear something."

"So would I?" Bob promptly agreed. "I'll bet Don Ferdinand is in there, and I'd like to get him out."

"Not much chance of that right now," said the flyer. He was silent, thinking. Finally he gave a

decisive little nod. "By George, it's better than doing nothing."

"What is? Shall we have a try at storming the place?"

"No, of course not. But I think I'll take a stroll down the street. Maybe I'll hear something. The house is isolated. It's probably open on account of this heat. If people are talking inside, I may catch a hint of what's going on."

"You'll take a stroll?" said Bob. "Why not 'we'?"

"No, I'll go alone. Best not to put our eggs in one basket. Besides if by any chance, somebody jumps me, I've got a gun and can defend myself. You haven't."

"Huh. Guess I can swing a mean fist."

The flyer grinned. "Nothing doing. I've got charge of this expedition, and orders are that you stay here and watch me. Besides, if I get into trouble, you'll be free to bring aid, while if you were along and we both were done in—just supposing the worst that might happen—where would your friends look for us?"

Bob grumbled, only half-convinced.

"I'll stroll around the block and join you here again," said the flyer. "Nothing's going to happen. Really, there's not much sense in my going, only I do feel that there's a chance of learning something.

In case anything does happen to me, hop back to our stolen flivver and light out for Laredo and when you get near the Bridge abandon the car so that you won't be stopped in case the owner has sent out a police warning. We'll square accounts for that car later. Cross the Bridge and go to the nearest telephone and call the Border Patrol. Ask for Captain Murray. Remember that name, Murray. Tell him what's what, and he'll attend to the rest. And don't by any chance make the mistake of trying to come to my rescue single-handed, because without a gun you'd be a goner. And you'd be throwing away my chance, too. I don't think anything's going to happen, but if it does, I want to be sure you'll stick to that plan. How about it?"

"Oh, all right," said Bob, ungraciously. "I'll do as you say. Only you must see that it doesn't give me a chance for action."

"That remains to be seen. If you should have to call for Murray, you'll have to be his guide. And that would bring you action a-plenty."

"Wouldn't he be out of luck, invading a foreign country?" asked Bob, curiously.

"Leave that to him. Anyway, what are we doing?"

"Oh, we're just acting on our own," said Bob. "That's different."

"Not much. Well, so long. See you in a couple of minutes."

"So long," answered Bob. "And the best of luck."

Thereupon Captain Cornell strolled nonchalantly around the corner, and set off at the dawdling pace of the loafer, toward the house of mystery and the car of midnight blue.

CHAPTER XIV.

A NOVEL S. O. S.

It was a silent sun-drenched street. Down at the bull ring they were just then watching Estramadura in the act of despatching his second bull, with ahead of them the prospect of Juan Salento playing a return engagement, making the fourth and final fight of the afternoon. No well-regulated bull fight at Nueva Laredo would pretend to be worthy of consideration without four encounters. Estramadura had been followed by his Mexican rival, who had successfully defended his reputation and had performed even more thrillingly than his fellow matador from Spain. Practically all Nueva Laredo was down there making holiday, and so not a soul appeared in sight on the sun-filled Calle Libertad except Captain Cornell.

Reconnoitering from the corner, Bob watched the departing back of his companion, enviously at first. Just his luck, he thought somewhat bitterly, to be left out of the fun. He recalled his words earlier uttered to Frank and Jack to the effect that

no adventures ever were going to happen to him again. Well, wasn't this proving the truth of his prophecy, he argued? Here he was, led up to a possible adventure, and then left standing safely, out of all possibility of becoming involved in it himself.

Then he grinned to himself as he noticed Captain Cornell swinging farther along the silent, deserted street. Probably, after all, nothing was going to happen to him, either. It certainly looked as if that house of mystery, with the midnight blue car at the door, was incapable of producing adventure. Captain Cornell would have his walk for nothing. He'd just swing around the block and come back to where Bob was standing, and have his pains for nothing.

Bob grinned as he shifted weight on the other foot, and sought a new resting place for his shoulder against the 'dobe wall of the little house against which he was leaning. It was a sour grin. After coming this far, after running off with somebody else's car, Bob wanted something to happen. Nevertheless, nothing was going to happen. Of that now he became convinced. It took Captain Cornell an interminably long time to reach the house of mystery. But now at last he was abreast of it. Bob peering forth contracted his brows in a frown of disappointment. He didn't want any

harm to come to his companion, of course. Just the same, he did have the feeling of having been cheated by fate. There was Captain Cornell sauntering leisurely by the house into which Ramirez had disappeared, glancing casually at the car of midnight blue and pausing a moment to examine it.

Bob paid due tribute to that bit of acting. "Just what a fellow strolling by might be expected to do," he told himself. "Naturally, when he sees a handsome car like that, all by itself, out here in the 'Sticks,' he'll give it a glance."

Then two men came out of the house. The figure of one was unfamiliar. The other, however, Bob made sure, despite the distance intervening, was Ramirez. Captain Cornell straightened up at the sound of footsteps behind him.

Bob held his breath. No, they were merely going to climb into the car, it appeared. And the doughty flyer was saying something to them. Doubtless, a word of apology for examining the car. All three stood in a little group. Ramirez and Captain Cornell seemed to be engaged in conversation.

Suddenly, so swiftly that for the moment Bob was left stunned and breathless, the other of the precious pair who was slightly in the rear of the American flyer hit him on the head with some small

object. Captain Cornell did not even scream. Instead, he fell forward stricken into the waiting arms of Ramirez, and the latter and his companion started dragging him up the steps.

At that Bob's wits returned in a measure and, darting away from the corner as if hurled from a bow, he shot forward at arrow-like speed. He uttered no sound, his feet made no noise on the dirt sidewalk that could be heard far down the block. And Ramirez and his companion did not look toward him.

But before he had gone a hundred feet, the two men dragging the insensible form of the American flyer disappeared within the house.

Bob groaned and pulled up short. To dash on and beat at the doors of that sinister house, unarmed and alone, would be nothing less than madness. It was the thing which he felt like doing, but good sense warned against it.

No, he must think of some other way of rescuing his companion. And now, as standing there in the street, the knowledge of what depended upon him alone came to him, he was filled with anxiety lest already he might have attracted unwelcome attention to his presence. He looked around quickly to see if he was observed, but the street was as blank, as deserted, as before Captain Cornell had started strolling down its length.

Yet tragedy had struck in those few brief minutes! Bob shivered, not with physical fear, but in the uncanny feeling that everywhere there were eyes watching his every move. He couldn't see anybody, yet the feeling persisted. Putting it down to taut nerves, and deciding that the best thing for him to do was to get back around the corner and out of sight Bob turned and ran back to his former vantage point. There he paused for another look down the Calle Libertad. What irony, he thought! Liberty Street!

Seeing no signs of life behind him, he started to retrace his steps toward the commandeered flivver, over the route which he and Captain Cornell had so recently covered. There was only one thing to do, and that was to act as Captain Cornell had directed. Get into that flivver, race madly for the Bridge, abandon the car out of sight of the Bridge police, and then get a taxi to the American side and there telephone Captain Murray at the flying field.

"He'll know what to do," Captain Cornell had declared.

"Hurry, hurry, hurry," was beating in Bob's brain. He began to run.

"Senor, Senor," a voice called. Bob turned his head. It was the Mexican lad with whom he had been talking only a short time before. "Senor,"

said the boy, coming to the fence as Bob slowed his pace, "are you not going to inspect my radio?" There was entreaty in his voice. But it was not the lad's pleading which caused Bob to hale as if smitten. Great Scott, why hadn't he thought of this before? Why, he could radio the American flying field from this station, and while rescuers were on their way, could keep the house into which his friend had been dragged, under surveillance.

"Look here," said he, swinging up to the fence, and leaning across with his hands gripping the pickets, "my friend is in trouble. Will you help me?"

"Senor, what do you mean? How can I help?"

"Let me use your radio to call for assistance for him."

Bob's eyes bored into the lad. How far dared he trust him?

A shrewd look crossed the Mexican youth's features. He looked up at Bob, towering above him.

"Is it something about the house of the Japanese?"

"Yes, it is."

Bob leaped the fence. If the lad gave him permission to use the radio, well and good. If he didn't, well—Bob's lips set into a grim line. Now that he saw this way out of his dilemma, he intended to use it whether the youngster objected or

not. But, instead of objecting or of showing fear, the boy, on the contrary, was all eagerness to help.

To him this was the call to adventure. He sensed the presence of a mystery, and he was all a-quiver to have a hand in it. Seizing Bob by a sleeve, he turned and sped toward the open door of the little house.

"Come, come, Senor," he cried. "If my radio can be of service, use it."

In two steps they were across the threshold and in a spotlessly neat room sparsely furnished, with a shining array of instruments along one side wall, upon which Bob's eye instantly fell. But before making for the radio table, Bob turned to the boy and asked: "Your mother?"

"She visits her sister. I am alone."

Ignoring everything else in the room Bob crossed the intervening space in two great strides and flinging himself into the waiting chair began hastily running his eye over the instrument board in front of him. His host was at his shoulder, explaining in quick prideful phrases. Impatiently Bob stopped his flow of words with upraised hand. He was trying to think.

"What street is this?"

"Senor, but—" The boy's thoughts did not follow so readily. "Oh, the Street of Our Lady of Guadalupe."

"Huh. And that street back there"—pointing—"the one where you said was this secret passage into the Japanese house?"

"The Avenue of the Presidents."

"Good enough," said Bob. "Thanks." And he swung the transmitter toward him. "Say, you know the calls of the stations around here?"

"Senor, there are none except my own."

The boy swelled out his chest like a pouter pigeon, and Bob had hard work cloaking a grin.

"I mean across the Border. What's the call of the American flying field?"

"Senor, it doesn't broadcast. I do not know. But is it the flyers you would call? Are you an aviator? Is your companion an aviator? What has happened? You have not told me."

"Hold your horses," said Bob, at this flood of questions, lapsing into English. "Thou shalt be told," he added hastily in the youth's own speech. "All in good time. Meantime, there is a man to be aided."

"And do you call a Doctor?"

"Yes," said Bob, grimly. "A couple of them."

And at that a plan of procedure which his mind had been busy upon all the time that he had been answering the boy's questions took shape and, picking up a hammer and a metal bar, he began striking them together in front of the broadcaster.

"Clang, clang," rang the strokes in the little room, until it sounded like a smithy. The boy stood with open mouth. It was hot, and the perspiration poured down Bob's face in runlets. But still he hammered on. Once he paused to pick up the headpiece from the table and clap the phones to his ears. Then he resumed operations. For a moment or two he would bang away, then wait, listening; then he would start banging again.

At last the boy could not restrain himself any more. He plucked Bob by a sleeve.

"Senor, what is it?"

"Morse," flung out Bob. "Keep quiet a minute. Think I've got 'em."

He listened, and a triumphant grin overspread his features. Then, rapidly, with hammer and metal bar, he again resumed telegraphing. Finally, laying his makeshift key aside, he spoke rapidly into the transmitter. "I'll be waiting," he said, "speed up."

CHAPTER XV.

BOB HAS AN IDEA.

From that ordeal Bob sat back with a smile of triumph upon his face. Hot it was, beastly hot, and the very tauntness of his nerves during the time when he had sought unavailingly to gain the attention of the American aviation field had brought out the perspiration stinging on his body. But he had succeeded, he had gained the ear of a wireless operator and help had been promised him in as short a time as it would take to journey in high-powered motor cars to his present whereabouts. Therefore, he could afford to forget the wretched discomfort of his body, and did so.

Why he had used the Morse code he could not have told. Something had impelled him to do so, some warning or inner prompting not to call in English lest, perchance, there should be someone tuning in on the Mexican side of the Border who would hear and understand. A certain risk he must run in using Morse, yet a considerably lessened risk.

And at any rate, he had been understood. His

message of pleading had been received at the flying field. Of that he was certain. And now help would come, help for the rescuing of his comrade from the sinister house into which he had been dragged.

But how long before the American aviators, rushing to the rescue, would arrive? They had said no time would be wasted in attempts to obtain the aid of the police of Nueva Laredo, but that they would come post haste. Yet still a measure of time must intervene. The flying field was some miles distant from Laredo. There might be delays at the Bridge. Bob's smile of triumph slowly faded to give way to a look of worry.

Young Juan Salazar watched him with puzzled frown all this while. He was too polite, seeing Bob's pre-occupation, to interrupt with questions. But they crowded to his lips. There were so many things that he wanted to know. This likable young American was in trouble, his companion in worse case. And Juan had a healthy's boy's curiosity to learn all about it. Yet still Bob sat silent, his eyes bent in a growing frown upon the floor, and still Juan held his peace while the flies buzzed in the unscreened room for all its cleanliness. Until at length the younger lad no longer could restrain himself and cried out:

"Senor, can you not trust me? What has happened?"

At that Bob woke with a start from his moodiness

and looked at Juan a long minute while the thoughts upon which he had been pondering dropped into the background. Could the boy be trusted? There was a ring of sincerity in his tone, an honest scorn in his references earlier to the house which harbored Ramirez. Yes, he could be trusted. So then Bob got up from his chair and strode to the door, and back again, and once more sat down in an endeavor to still the nervousness preying upon him.

If there were only something he could do, he thought, to while away the dragging minutes before help could arrive. And at that he leaped from his chair with a sharp exclamation. There was something he could do; of a certainty, there was. And what was more, it was something which ought to be done. Fool that he was not to have thought of it earlier?

"Juan," he exclaimed sharply, "we are in trouble of the worst sort. You have been a good lad and have helped me much with permission to use your radio. Are you willing now to help more?"

"Trust me," said Juan, drawing himself up proudly. "You are in trouble. And if I can be of help—"

"You can, indeed," Bob interrupted. "Listen. This is a mess. It's too long to explain now. We would waste valuable moments in doing so. Juan, there are evil men in that house. They have captured my companion and dragged him within. Me

they did not see. I do not believe they know I am in the vicinity. My friend is an American Army aviator. I have called for others who will be here shortly from the Laredo flying field. I gave them your address, and directed them to approach by the Avenue of the Presidents.

"Attend now," he said sharply. "Until they come we must keep watch to see whether anyone leaves that house. There are two entrances the front of the house and this secret tunnel through the deserted house on the Avenue of the Presidents of which you have told me. I shall return to the corner of Calle Libertad and keep watch upon the front of the house, and do you post yourself so as to command a view of the secret exit.

"And now let us go. We have wasted too much time already. They may already have gone. Though, if their automobile is still before the house, I shall feel fairly assured that they are still within."

And concluding, Bob took young Juan by an arm and fixing a piercing gaze upon the other's flushed face, demanded:

"Will you do it?"

"Oh, yes, Senor."

"Then, come, let us go."

"But," Juan frowned deprecatingly.

"But what?"

"The rescuers. If they come—"

"They will come by the Avenue of the Presidents. You must hail them and bring them here and summon me. Do you understand?"

"I understand, Senor."

"Then go. And I'll take up my position." And hurrying Juan with him, Bob flung out of the house. The lad sprang one way and Bob another, and both ran along the deserted street without anyone to observe them or to marvel at this strange haste on a day so hot that even the scattered pepper and madrona trees, the dust of the roadway, and the drowsing mean little houses seemed cooked into lifelessness.

Back at his corner Bob peered forth with beating heart, eager to see if the car was still there, fearful of finding it gone. Had the latter been the case, he would have been at a loss, indeed, to know what next to do. Poor lad, it had all come upon him so suddenly that he was filled with self-reproaches and revilings. But the car still stood at the curb, and there was no more sign of life along the Calle Libertad than on that street at his back.

So then he crouched there by the corner of the mud-walled house and gave himself up thoroughly and completely to bitter reflections. The role in which he found himself was one altogether new. Many a time had he been in tight places with his comrades, Frank and Jack. In fact, wherever they

went and whatever they did, trouble seemed to follow them as inevitably as tides beat on the shore. But never that he could recall had he been placed in a passive position. And big Bob, who was not given overly much to deep thought, but was accustomed when in difficulties to hew his way out by main strength or at least to make the attempt so to do, groaned aloud.

The next moment he looked around fearfully, to see if he had been overheard. His nerves were jumpy. This atmosphere of the dead was getting on him. Especially, when he knew that all was not as quiet and deserted as the appearance of the streets would seem to give warrant. There was at least one house in which lurked sinister men. And if in one, why not in another?

But nothing not seen before met his gaze, and once more he returned to his vigil, while once more his thoughts played with the subject. Should he have let Captain Cornell venture forth alone upon his stroll past the house beyond? When the flyer was struck down without chance to offer a blow in self-defense, should he have gone forward as he had started to do and make attempt at rescue? Had he been coward to halt and turn back? But here good sense came to the fore and assured him that he had done the wisest thing. And good sense argued, moreover, that he had done more—he had, in fact,

done the very wisest thing possible under the circumstances in calling the aviation field by radio.

And so, somewhat heartened, he turned his thoughts to speculation upon what mischief Ramirez intended. What was going on in that shuttered house of the Japanese? Where was Don Ferdinand and had evil befallen him? What had betrayed Captain Cornell to his undoing? Had he said something which aroused the suspicion of Ramirez, causing the latter to signal his men to fell the flyer? Had Ramirez seen and recognized them at the bull fight, and, recalling that, on beholding Captain Cornell face to face, struck on the impulse? He could not know, and shrugged. These were questions that would have to await developments for answer.

And so he stood and watched the length of the street, and wiped the sweat from his face from time to time, while his thoughts raced on their futile questionings. Every now and then he would look at his watch, and each time he would marvel anew at the slow and dragging passage of the minutes. It was not yet time for Captain Murray to arrive. Not by any possibility could he have covered the miles so quickly.

Yet Bob was fretting at the delay. What if Ramirez emerged before Murray's arrival? And started to depart? Bob could not halt him single handed? And if he took with him Captain Cornell,

perhaps bound and gagged, what track of them could Bob keep? The flivver, yes, the flivver. He could and would follow in that, provided they did not pass from sight before he could get to where it was parked on the back street. But even then, the damage would be great. If Ramirez should go any considerable distance, if, for instance, he should elect to go into the country—to some hiding place—how track him without discovery?

All he could do was hope that help would arrive before any possible departure of Ramirez. And while he was thinking upon this, there came to him suddenly the suspicion that Ramirez might suspect he was under surveillance and might leave the automobile before the house as a blind and quietly withdraw with his captive by means of the secret exit. True, young Juan kept watch there. But if that happened, if Ramirez should seek thus to escape, would Juan be able to bring him warning in time for him to take the trail?

He turned at the thought, glancing up the street at his back. And his heart gave a bound, then seemed to stop, then raced on. And he groaned once more aloud. For down the street, pelting as hard as he could come, raced Juan Salazar. There was only one conclusion to be drawn and, as that took shape in his thoughts, Bob deserted his post and be-

gan running wildly to meet the Mexican lad. Nor for a moment did he note that behind the boy and close upon his heels came another figure, rounding the distant corner.

CHAPTER XVI.

SETTING THE TRAP

But all in a moment Bob saw, and his heart gave a great bound as if it would leave his breast. And then he but ran the harder. Until presently the running form behind young Juan closed up on the latter and drew abreast of him, and then two young fellows, breathing hard, paused and faced each other while from Bob's lips burst the single exclamation:

"Frank."

"Do I look like a ghost?" panted the latter, for in his comrade's eyes was such a gaze of utter astonishment as to prompt the question.

"No," said Bob slowly. "No-o." And the color which had drained from his cheeks returned.

"But—" And he passed a hand across his eyes, as if to test whether what he saw was vision or reality. "But," he added, "how in the world did you come here?"

"In a taxi," said Frank. And now Bob noted

a twinkle in his comrade's eyes, and he sensed that the latter was enjoying the situation.

He looked aside, puzzled, and noted young Juan standing by, all impatience, bouncing first on one leg and then on another.

"But you, Juan," he said in Spanish, "tell me. How did you happen to meet this man?"

"Oh, Senor, he and two others came racing in a taxicab along the Avenue of the Presidents. And I, thinking them your aviators, stepped out in the street and called to them to stop. Then they asked where you were, and I explained, and brought this one with me. And the others—they remain to keep watch on the place of which you know."

Bob made a gesture which seemed to say that he was more deeply bemused than before, and once more turned to Frank.

"Think a minute, old hot head," laughed Frank. "It was easy. You called the aviation field by radio and—"

But then Bob interrupted, as the light dawned.

"Great Scott," he cried, punching Frank so hard that the latter reeled backward; "what a boob! I forgot entirely about that belt radio of yours. So you heard me call."

"Not I?" said Frank, "but Jack. He was wearing it at the time. He remembers Morse better than I because he's been using it lately. And when

he heard you rapping out your call for the aviation field he became excited, and when he heard your explanation and call for help, nothing could hold him. He listened just long enough to get your directions. Then he and his father and I almost fought our way to the exit. For, you see, the bull fighting was still going on and the crowd hated to be disturbed by having us make our way out. We got many an ugly look, and there were cries against the hated Gringoes. I looked for a knife between my ribs every minute. But we managed.

"And then down at the gate there came a taxi cruising along providentially. Jack talked to the chauffeur, who said he could land us at the right place. Lucky you gave such explicit directions. And here we are. The rest you know."

Bob nodded. He was silent a moment, thinking. This unexpected appearance of help changed the complexion of matters. He must speak to Jack and Mr. Hampton and put them in full possession of the facts. But the corner he had watched must not be left unguarded.

"Juan," he said, turning to the Mexican boy, "these are not the aviators, but some other friends. We can do nothing as yet. I must consult with the others. Will you take my place at yonder corner and keep vigilant watch?"

"Oh, yes, Senor."

And young Juan, who was all a-quiver with the thrill of being in the midst of a mystery, sped willingly away.

"Come on." Bob took Frank's arm and headed him about.

Around the corner, and some distance removed from the deserted house which marked the exit of the secret tunnel, stood a taxicab drawn up behind the rattle-and-bang flivver which Bob and Captain Cornell had commandeered at the bull ring. Beside it on the sidewalk stood Mr. Hampton and Jack, and at the wheel drowsed the chauffeur. A quick glance showed Bob he was an American, one of the hardened Laredo breed.

Mutual explanations were quickly made, and then the three boys talked excitedly but in lowered voices, while Mr. Hampton listened with a smile of amusement. Hot heads they were, all for trying to gain entrance to the house into which Captain Cornell had been dragged, despite the fact that they were unarmed.

But Mr. Hampton shook his head.

"Why not?" persisted Bob. "All we have to do is to go up to the door and demand that our friend be turned over to us. There are five of us, counting the chauffeur, and Ramirez wouldn't dare to start anything with such a mob."

"But if he should—"

"In broad daylight? I don't think so," scoffed Bob.

"This isn't the United States, Bob," remarked Mr. Hampton. "No, the best we can do is to keep watch to see that they don't escape, and for that purpose I think we better divide our forces. Frank and I'll run around to young Juan's corner in the taxi, while you and Jack stay here with the flivver. We'll be ready in either case to take the trail, whether they leave by front or rear. Not that I believe Ramirez will leave until after dark, however."

"All right," grumbled Bob. "I've got sense enough to see that what you propose is really the right course. Just the same, I'd like a little action."

Mr. Hampton smiled, then his face drew into a thoughtful frown. "I wonder what is Ramirez's game," he said.

"And I wonder how he became suspicious of Captain Cornell," said Bob. "Well, no use speculating. You better get under way, if we are to keep double watch."

With a nod of agreement, Mr. Hampton turned toward the taxicab, beckoning Frank to follow. But they were not destined to put their plan into execution, for at that moment, Jack halted his father and pointed up the street. All turned to gaze. A powerful motor car, with the top down

and spilling over with men, was approaching at high speed. A comet's tail of dust whirled and eddied behind it. And the driven motor gave off a droning roar that was music to their ears.

"Hurray," cried Bob, exuberantly, "Captain Murray and his gang."

He leaped into the middle of the street, waving his arms frantically, and the car slackened speed and rolled to a stop behind the taxi. A half dozen young men, looking fit for anything, leaped to the ground and crowded around Bob.

"Where is he?"

"Where's the house?"

"Lead us to 'em."

"Here, fellows, give him air," said one, jovially, yet with the unmistakable ring of authority in his voice. Shoving aside one of the newcomers who blocked his way, he confronted Bob with outstretched hand. "I'm Murray, and I guess you're Bob Temple, aren't you? Didn't get the chance to meet you the other day when Cornell had you out at the field."

Bob looked into keen blue eyes on a level with his own, set in a sunburned face that won his instant liking. Their hands gripped, fell apart. Each felt an instinctive regard for the other.

"All we know is what you gave us through the air," laughed Captain Murray. "Shoot both barrels

as quickly as you can, so we know how the land lies. Then we'll go into action."

"Right," said Bob, "but, first, meet the rest of my gang."

Introductions followed, while Bob explained how his two friends and Mr. Hampton, overhearing his S.O.S. call to the aviators, had themselves responded. Briefly, he put Captain Murray in possession of the major facts.

The latter nodded briskly at Bob's conclusion. "First thing," he said, "you fellows who brought two automatics, kick loose with the spares. Right—" As his brother aviators began arming Mr. Hampton and the three boys. "Now, let's see. There are ten of us, not counting the chauffeur. I'll take four and go 'round to the front of the house. Lieutenant Bracewell, do you take charge with the other half of our party at this end. Mr. Hampton, will you and your son come with me. Hartridge, Thorsen. Fine."

He leaped to the wheel of the big car, and the others piled in behind him. A momentary pressure on the starter button, and the engine began to purr. Then he leaned out to give final instructions.

"Boys, we're going to get Cornell out of that. But I want you to remember that we're in a foreign country. If this came out, there would be a pretty mess. However, the outfit we are after un-

doubtedly is comprised of crooks who won't air their difficulties, so I think we are reasonably safe from the danger of embroiling the government with the Mexican authorities. However, if any trouble develops, I'll take the blame. You all are acting under my orders.

"Now, Lieutenant Bracewell, I'm going to pick up this Mexican boy that Bob has stationed around the corner and he'll point out the house. Then I'm going to go right up to the door and demand entrance. If they turn Cornell over to us, well and good. If they resist and I need help, I'll blow my whistle. You will be able to hear easily. Meantime, guard this secret exit. Got it?"

Young Lieutenant Bracewell, a slender taunt youngster little older than Bob, nodded. Among the aviators was an easy *camaraderie* that to Army martinets would have seemed lamentable. Yet co-operation was none the less effective.

Captain Murray released the clutch and the car rolled ahead, gathered speed, whirled around the corner, and disappeared from view.

Wasting no time, the young commander turned at once toward Bob with a question regarding the secret tunnel. Bob explained what Juan had told him. The other nodded.

"Well," he said, "the best thing for us to do is to get into that house and keep watch right at that

trap door. Should the rascals try to escape that way, it will be an easy matter to bag 'em one at a time as they climb out, while if we wait outside for them there is bound to be a fight. And we want to avoid bloodshed, if possible."

Bob nodded enthusiastic endorsement, and without any more being said the whole party with the exception of the American chauffeur of the taxicab started toward the house. Frank dropped behind for a word with the jehu, then rejoined the party.

"He wants to keep out of it," Frank said. "He's all right, but he has to do business in this town and doesn't like the notoriety. I told him we'd pay him handsomely."

As they approached the deserted house, Lieutenant Bracewell took the lead and tried the door. It was locked. They looked around for something with which to pry open the lock, but without success.

"Here, no time to waste," said the young leader. And stepping up, he placed the muzzle of his automatic against the key hole and pressed the trigger. The report was muffled. A strong shove, and the door flew open. There was only one room, and it was empty and deserted. Empty save for a litter of rubbish at one corner, which on examination showed signs of recent disturbance. Lieutenant Bracewell kicked it aside, and then emitted a grunt

of satisfaction. A trap door was exposed beneath the litter.

"Over to this side, fellows," he said, speaking in a low tone, and stepping to the side of the room which would be cut off by the upflung trapdoor from the view of anyone ascending from the tunnel. "No talking now. We'll give them a nice little surprise party, if they decide to come out this way."

CHAPTER XVII.

THROUGH THE TUNNEL.

For a little while, the space of a very few minutes, they were silent, looking at each other. And the hearts of the two youngest of the group beat painfully with suppressed excitement, nor were the three young aviators who clustered close in any better case, as their flushed cheeks and hurried breathing could have told. Until presently the sharp-faced young fellow next to Bob turned his uncovered blonde head and smiled through blue eyes while he muttered impatiently that waiting was too tideous to please him.

"What would you do?" whispered Bob, at random.

"Do?" said the other—young Harincourt, who had stayed a hundred hours in the air, part of it during a storm of lashing rain and wind. "Do?" he repeated. "Why, what but invade the tunnel."

They spoke in so subdued a murmur that their whisperings were inaudible to the others. Bob stared, fascinated, into the other's eyes. But before

he could make comment on the daring suggestion, there came an interruption from an unsuspected source. The street door was flung open, and the taxicab jehu stood in the doorway. Taut nerves taking alarm, all in the room swung quickly about, and Lieutenant Bracewell strode swiftly to the other's side.

"Man," he said, "you took a long chance. We might have plugged you."

"Huh." The chauffeur blinked as if not comprehending, and without further comment burst out with: "Did yuh hear the shots?"

"Shots. What shots?" The others crowded close.

"Why, I heard two—three shots from the direction your friends took. Thought you'd be comin' out a-runnin' but when you didn't I bust in to find out why."

They glanced at each other, eyes lighting with excitement. Then young Harincourt cried breathlessly: "Let's go." He started to move toward the door, but Lieutenant Bracewell dropped a hand on his arm, staying him.

"Wait a minute. Captain Murray said we should come only in case he blew his whistle. Did you—" he demanded of the chauffeur—"hear the whistle?"

"Whistle? No."

"Then we stay."

Young Harincourt started to protest, but Lieutenant Bracewell silenced him with a wave of the hand. No, more. Gripping the chauffeur by an arm, he drew him within the room, and quickly closed the door.

"Everybody back in that corner behind the trap," he commanded, lowering his voice to a whisper. "And no noise. If Captain Murray is forcing an entrance to the house, it's more than likely that the fellows he's after may try to escape through the tunnel."

Tiptoeing, the little party, now augmented to six with the advent of the chauffeur, regained its former position. And for a moment none spoke but, instead, all strained to hear any sounds that might arise from the other side of the trap door. But no such sound was heard, nor did whistle blast or distant pistol shot come from without.

Young Harincourt stirred impatiently. Leaning close, he whispered something in Lieutenant Bracewell's ear over which the latter seemed to ponder a moment. Then a nod of the head gave assent and Harincourt, creeping forward soundlessly, bent above the trap door.

"Great Scott," Bob muttered voicelessly, "I'll bet he's persuaded Bracewell to carry out that crazy scheme. Well, if there's any kind of battle going

on in that house, it'll be a good idea to take 'em in the rear."

Bob's surmise was correct. It was just such a plan which Harincourt had proposed, and to which Lieutenant Bracewell had given assent.

But even as young Harincourt bent above the trap door, there came a sound from beneath it—a fumbling, scratching sound. He fell back precipitately, and the others crowded closer. The next moment the trap began to rise. Tense with expectancy though he was, Bob smiled as the thought occurred to him that young Harincourt should have selected this of all times to launch his coup—should have waited until the very second when the enemy was preparing to emerge. For that it was the enemy, Bob had no doubt. Captain Murray and his aviators, supported by Mr. Hampton and Jack, undoubtedly had gained entrance at the front of the house. Now Ramirez and whatever men he had with him were fleeing through the underground passage. So sure of this was Bob, crouching low behind the shield afforded by the rising trap door, that he was quite prepared to see Ramirez himself climb out.

Young Harincourt and Bob, who had sprung to his side on divining the other's intention to invade the tunnel, were the foremost members of the little party crouching with drawn weapons behind the

trap door. They hardly dared to breath lest some sound escape them which would give the alarm to whoever was about to ascend. For that someone was ascending there could be no doubt. The trap door was not rising because of any supernatural agency. A man's hand was pushing it up, and a man's foot was scraping on the steps.

But who that man was could not be seen, for the trap door intervened. Suddenly, however, it slipped from the grasp of whoever was on the steps below and fell back on the floor, almost in the faces of Bob and Harincourt. So close did it come to them, in fact, that they swayed backward, taken by surprise.

"Hey," cried the man on the steps, in alarm, "don't shoot. This is your little playmate."

And he ducked beneath the level of the floor, as he saw the leveled revolvers of the party, all pointing directly at him.

It was Captain Murray.

For a moment, the party on guard was stunned into silence. Then they all crowded forward, peering down into the tunnel and crying to Captain Murray to ascend. This he did, as soon as he noted from their cries that he had been recognized. And behind him came Jack.

"This is a pretty kettle of fish," he cried, as he gained the floor and looked around, frowning.

"What do you mean?" asked Lieutenant Bracewell.

"Didn't the rascals come out this way?"

"Not unless they oozed out," said the other.

He and the others who had been on guard were bewildered at the question, and Bob interrupted with:

"Didn't you find them in the house, Captain?"

But Captain Murray, ignoring his question, turned with decision and leaped down the steps into the tunnel.

"Come on, everybody," he cried. "There's no time to lose. They're hiding out in the house somewhere."

And he started running along the tunnel, flashing the rays of an electric pocket torch ahead of him. Not knowing what had occurred but willing to accept the fact that a chance for action lay ahead, Bracewell, Harincourt, the third young airman who had been in the group in the old 'dobe hut, and Bob, jostled each other for places in the line behind him. But Frank drew Jack aside to ask him what had occurred.

"They wouldn't open to us," said Jack, hurriedly, "so we fired a couple of shots through the door and then broke it down. Then we raced through the house. It's a big place of two stories, with ten or a dozen rooms. In one of them we found Captain

Cornell, bound and gagged. But no trace of the others, so Captain Murray and I went down to the cellar and found the entrance to this tunnel, without waiting to question Cornell. Come on, let's hurry."

And as the way being cleared by the disappearance of young Gordon, the last of the airmen to descend, the tunnel was now open to passage, Jack darted down the stairs. Frank followed at his heels. It was dark, only a faint glow, far ahead, showing where Captain Murray's electric torch headlighted the procession. The air smelled musty. The walls were little more than a big man's width apart, and the roof so low that the boys had to stoop in order to avoid bumping their heads as they proceeded. Ahead of them could be heard muttered exclamations as first one and then another, in his eagerness to make haste, ignored the necessary caution and suffered a bump.

"Bend down, and you'll be all right," advised Jack. "It's a straight shoot to the other house, and the floor is smooth. Come on."

Presently the two boys, who had closed up on the heels of the last of the group ahead, emerged into a celler where they found the others waiting them.

"All here?" asked Captain Murray, flashing his spotlight from form to form. "All right, let's go."

But just as he was in the act of mounting an open stairway to the floor above, and had, in fact, placed a foot on the first step of the ascent, Jack halted him with a hand on his arm.

"Listen, Captain, what was that?"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ENEMY STRIKE.

In the sudden silence which fell on the group at Jack's low-spoken cry, not a sound was to be heard.

Captain Murray shook off Jack's grasp on his arm and mounted another step.

"You're hearing things, my boy. I didn't hear a sound. Ah!"

The exclamation was jerked from him as, distinct, yet faint, there came a distant thud. It might have been the slamming of a door, or the dropping of some heavy object. What it was, Captain Murray did not wait to hear, but with a cry of "Come, come on, fellows," he started to bound up the cellar steps, the bullseye of light from his torch showing a closed door at their head.

After him leaped the others, crowding the narrow stairway. But as Captain Murray reached the door and grasped the handle, he came to an abrupt halt. The door was locked. And as the others piled up behind him, there came to their ears the sharp crack of revolver shots, muffled by distance and interven-

ing walls and floors, from somewhere in the body of the house above them.

"Something funny here," muttered Captain Murray. "We left this door open."

But in the same breath he was thrust aside and against the stone wall on his left, while a bulky form brushed by him on the right, along the unrailed edge of the stairway, and went crashing, shoulder first, into the locked door ahead. The door reeled under the impact, but still held. However, it was made of flimsy material and once more the big fellow who had taken the initiative crashed into it. The door flew outward, and the human battering ram with it, landing on hands and knees.

It was Bob. He jumped to his feet as first Captain Murray and then the others started forward over the breach which he had made.

"Which way?" he cried.

The spatter of revolver shots, heard when they had been crowded together on the stairway, had ceased. The house was silent about them. They looked at each other, nonplussed. Then Jack raising his voice shouted:

"Dad, Dad, where are you?"

A moment. Then from overhead came Mr. Hampton's voice in reply:

"Up here, Jack. In the front room."

There was a faintness in the tone, however,

which was far from re-assuring and Jack cried again:

"What's all the shooting for, Dad? You all right?"

A hollow groan was his only answer. And at that Jack thrust aside Captain Murray, who stood between him and a door leading from the kitchen, into which they had emerged from the cellar stairway, into the body of the house, and darted ahead.

"After him, fellows," said Captain Murray, setting the example. "That's the way upstairs."

Jack in the lead, the rout streamed through a large room bare of furnishings as had been the kitchen, and lighted only dimly by reason of the fact that latticed shutters barred the several windows. Out of this into a long hall leading to the front door, then a sharp turn to the left and up a boxed-in flight of stairs. Heavy boots beat a tattoo on the bare boards.

Filled with terrifying fears on account of his father, Jack was racing madly in the lead, with Captain Murray at his heels, followed by Bob and Frank, and the others streaming after. At the head of the stairway, they turned again to the left, entering a corridor which led toward the street front. On the left, above the dark stairway, was a hand rail; on the right a number of doors opened into rooms, into which those of the party who, unlike

Jack and Captain Murray, had not before been over the ground, peered as they ran by. But the rooms were unfurnished, except for mattresses and crumpled coverlets seeming to cover every available inch of floor space; and they were unoccupied, too. The corridor ended at the open door of a larger room than the others which faced on the street, and into this dashed Jack, going straight, with a strangled cry, to the form of his father. Mr. Hampton lay on a greasy mattress, near the front wall, and beside an open window looking out upon the street. His face was white, and his eyes closed, and the left shoulder of his light-colored, summer coat was stained dark.

Jack had no eyes for anyone but his father, beside whom he knelt with a choking cry which caused the latter to open his eyes.

"They got away, Jack," said Mr. Hampton, painfully. "But you're safe, aren't you? I was afraid —"

His voice dropped to an unintelligible murmur, and his eyelids fluttered shut again.

Jack looked up, staring around wildly, as if for help. But the others had deserted him. And then for the first time he saw the other occupants of the big front room. In the far corner they lay— the two aviators who had accompanied the Hamptons and Captain Murray into the house, and Cap-

tain Cornell. All three were bound. Jack half rose to his feet in astonishment. Captain Cornell had been found bound and gagged when they first had gained entrance to the house. But how came these others so? When he and Captain Murray had descended to the cellar in search of the tunnel entrance, they had left his father on the lower floor, and the two aviators upstairs cutting Captain Cornell's bonds. He passed a hand across his eyes.

Well, that mystery must be left to solution by the men loosing the bonds of the trio. His part was to get aid for his father. He called, and Bob and Frank broke away from the little group on the opposite side of the room and hurried to him. An ordinary emergency might have found Jack the coolest of the three. But in a case such as this, involving his father, positions were reversed. The poor fellow was half frantic. And Bob and Frank, with an exchange of understanding glances, elbowed him aside and went to their knees beside Mr. Hampton.

The latter again opened his eyes, and as his glance fell on them he spoke in a stronger voice.

"The bullet took me in the shoulder, boys," he said. "Don't think it smashed the bone, although it was a close shave. Wasn't that knocked me out, but when I fell I struck the wall with my head. Cut off my coat, so you can see what to do. Then bind

my shoulder up with something, and I'll manage to survive, I reckon."

His voice gained in strength as he proceeded, and on concluding he struggled to sit up. Jack with a gulp of relief got on his other side and thrust an arm beneath him. Bob, opposite, did likewise; and Mr. Hampton was raised to a sitting position against the wall.

"Stripping for action, Frank?" asked Mr. Hampton with an attempt to smile that ended in a grimace of pain. "No use. It's all over. They got away out of the window."

Frank had torn off his light-weight summer coat and now ruthlessly stripping off his white linen shirt with a great popping of buttons ripped it in half from collar to neckband and began tearing the halves thus created into quarters.

"Making bandages," he said. "Peel off his coat, fellows. Don't stand there like ninnies."

Jack and Bob hastened to comply, easing the wounded shoulder as much as possible, and, having removed the coat, stripped off the shirt sleeve, revealing a hole through the shoulder muscles, from which the blood was slowly pumping.

"Hurry, now, one of you, get some water," commanded Frank. "Must be water somewhere. Jack, you've been through here. Maybe, there's a bathroom. If not, there must be water in the kitchen.

If you can't find anything to put it in, take this cloth and wet it well." And thrusting one of the long strips into Jack's hands he sent him scurrying away with a peremptory gesture.

With another of the linen strips, Frank wiped the blood away from the wound in Mr. Hampton's shoulder, discovering that the bullet had entered from the rear, where there was only a bluish mark that already had stopped bleeding, and had come out in front. "No sir, didn't smash the bone," he said, thankfully, as with deft fingers he felt of the wounded man's shoulder. "You were in luck, Mr. Hampton."

"I was that," the other answered. "Came on them just as they were leaving. But here's Captain Murray, wanting to hear my story," he added glancing up at the aviator, who, striding across the room, was now bending anxiously above him. "I don't know all that happened, Captain," he said. "But between our friends over there and myself, I guess we can piece the yarn together."

CHAPTER XIX.

CAPTAIN CORNELL STRIKES A CLEW.

After that it did not take long for the truth to come out. And Captain Murray's impatience to be gone rather than risk staying where the police of Nueva Laredo were liable to come upon them, expedited matters. What had happened was that Ramirez and three others had fled to the roof, by way of a trap door so cleverly concealed as to have escaped being seen and noted by the invading Americans.

Whither they had fled was unknown, however, by Captain Cornell. Bound, gagged, flung into a corner of the big second-floor front room, he had known nothing of his captors' movements.

"And so when Jack and I left the rest of you to explore the tunnel, Ramirez and his gang came down from the roof and jumped you?" questioned Captain Murray.

Mr. Hampton nodded. His wound was causing him pain, yet not enough to prevent him from acting as spokesman.

"I left you fellows in the cellar, and then started back upstairs. When I reached the kitchen, I was in the act of closing the door when—"

"That's right," interrupted Captain Murray. "You did go down the cellar and see us off. I was thinking Jack and I had gone alone and had left that cellar door standing open. You must have closed it, and locked it. Did you? Or did the Mexicans?"

"I confess I don't know," admitted Mr. Hampton. "But I imagine that in my excitement I must have locked the door. I'm accustomed to locking doors, anyway. It's a habit, and I lock a door without giving the matter any thought. But the Mexicans couldn't have done it. They didn't come downstairs."

"Hm! You speak of being excited. What happened?"

"Why, just as I was closing the door to the cellar I heard a dull thud coming from the floor above. Then there was a muffled shuffling of feet, as if of men wrestling."

Quickly Mr. Hampton continued. His first instinctive feeling, after hearing those strange noises from the rooms above, was to shout to his companions and ask them what was wrong? But he resisted the impulse. He feared that in some way the enemy had returned; and, if they did not al-

ready know of his presence, he had no intention of warning them. Taking off his shoes, he moved swiftly yet soundlessly up the stairs and along the corridor toward the front room. All the time he could hear sounds as of men grunting and straining, but no shouts, no exclamations.

And when he saw into the front room, the explanation was made plain. The three aviators, including Captain Cornell and his rescuers, evidently had been taken at a disadvantage. In fact, they here confirmed Mr. Hampton's assumption that Ramirez and his assistants had stolen upon them while Captain Cornell was being freed from his bonds.

With revolvers leveled at them and under command not to make an outcry, there was nothing the Americans could do except to comply with the request to put up their hands. This they did.

"And what I heard," said Mr. Hampton, "was the grunting and tugging of the Mexicans as they busied themselves at the task of roping and gagging our friends.

"Then I had a piece of hard luck," he added, with a rueful smile. "I decided to take the Mexicans by surprise, as obviously they had taken my friends. If I could get the drop on them, I might force them into a corner and hold them until you returned. And I think I would have accomplished

it, too. They had their backs turned and didn't see me. But Captain Cornell was looking my way and —"

"And I gave you away," interrupted the flyer, bitterly. "I didn't mean, too," he mourned. "But something in my eyes warned Ramirez, who was looking at me."

"He whirled quick as a flash," added Mr. Hampton. "And he shot toward the doorway as he turned. I jumped aside, but he caught me in the shoulder."

"Yes, and I'll say this," declared Captain Cornell, admiringly, "you were game to the core. Why," he explained, turning to his friend and rescuer, Captain Murray, "that bullet in the shoulder, at that close range, was enough to knock another man down. But Mr. Hampton leaped behind the door jam, and the next second his shots began streaming into the room. Say, you should have seen those rascals jump for the windows."

"Trouble was I had to shoot with my left hand," Mr. Hampton explained, "and I was feeling weak, besides."

"Out they all went, one after another," added Captain Cornell. "It isn't a long drop from these second-floor windows to the ground, and they took the shortest route. I'm sorry Ramirez got away. But I'm glad Mr. Hampton came when he did, for

I had the feeling that Ramirez contemplated dealing out an unlovely fate to us."

"And the rest you know," added Mr. Hampton. "When the Mexicans cleared out I tried to get to the window to take another shot at them, but managed to get just about that far when faintness overcame me. That's when you called, Jack," he added, turning toward his son.

A quick council was held. It was decided that the best thing for all concerned was to get back to American soil, as soon as possible. It was not likely that Ramirez would return. But he might notify the Mexican police that a party of Americans had broken into the house; and then complications unpleasant to contemplate would arise, if the police found them in possession.

There were many things still unexplained, still a mystery. Where was Don Ferdinand? What was the particular brand of deviltry actuating Ramirez? Why had Captain Cornell been taken prisoner? But these questions would have to wait for explanation. What was of moment was that Captain Cornell had been rescued at a cost of no wounds except Mr. Hampton's, and it not serious. And the thing to do was to get away and regain the protection of American soil. "All right," said Mr. Hampton, when this had been agreed on. "Jack, you've got

long legs. Run around and get our taxi and bring it here."

Jack started away obediently, but was halted by a dismayed cry from Bob: "My flivver. My stolen flivver."

"Leave it where it is," said Mr. Hampton, quickly. "I noticed it bore an American license. When we get back to Laredo, I'll find out the owner, and buy him a new car. If you undertake to run it back across the Border, you'll be halted. And then a lot of useless explanations will have to be made. And dangerous ones, too. As for the owner," he added, with a smile, "I'm sure he'll not object to getting a new car for his old one."

"I'll say not," said Bob, fervently, thinking of the jouncing he had received. It was a sentiment in which Captain Cornell heartily joined.

Bob left with Jack, in order to thank young Juan Salazar, who had been of such great help, and to bind him to secrecy. During their absence a hurried search was made of the house. There was little furniture, only a great number of pallets scattered through all the rooms, both upstairs and down. There were no cabinets in which to look for papers, which might offer some clew to the mystery of what was Ramirez's occupation. And over all there hung a perceptible odor at which the searchers sniffed now and again, puzzled. It was elusive yet pun-

gent, and its origin could not be traced. But finally Captain Murray declared with a shout that he "had it."

The others ran up to find him standing in the middle of the floor of an upstairs room, a number of dirty pallets with their filthy blankets about his feet.

"I think I know what Ramirez is up to now," he declared, in answer to inquiries. "Sniff, you fellows. Can't you tell what's in the air? It's the reek of Orientals. Ramirez is smuggling again. But this time he's smuggling bigger game than usual."

"What do you mean? Opium?" asked young Harincourt.

"Opium? No." Captain Cornell was scornful.

"Well, but you said this smell is Oriental. And I notice it, too, now that you call attention to it."

"It's Oriental, all right. But, look around you. See all these pallets. Fellows, this is a receiving station for human contraband. Either Chinamen or Japanese are bedded here until Ramirez can deliver them across the Border in defiance of our immigration laws. By George," he added, drawing a long breath, "that's it. I had a suspicion of it earlier. The racket we've been through rather scattered my wits. But now that I use the old head

and put two and two together, I get the answer all right."

The other nodded. Only Mr. Hampton seemed uncertain.

"I don't know, Captain," he said. "That leaves so much to be explained. Why should Ramirez have drawn Don Ferdinand's workers from the mine? How did he happen to lure away my cook, Ramon? Don Ferdinand suspected Ramirez of working up a revolutionary movement, you know. That's why he followed Ramirez here clear from his distant estate."

"That's all true enough," said Captain Cornell. "But I believe when your friend Don Ferdinand turns up, you'll find out that I'm right. However, the cars are outside. Let's get back to Laredo as quickly as the law will allow us. The bull fight will soon be over, and if we can get across the Bridge before the crowd hits it, we'll be better off."

"I suppose there's nothing else to do now," said Mr. Hampton, reluctantly joining the procession descending the stairs. "But I'm worried about Don Ferdinand. I didn't think so much of his failure to keep his appointment with us at the Hamilton Hotel. But when you discover that Ramirez had Don Ferdinand's car, that puts a different complexion on the matter. He must be in captivity somewhere."

"Say, Mr. Hampton," said Frank, who was just ahead of him, and who halted abruptly, "what fools we are. Has anybody thought to look on the roof?"

Mr. Hampton and Captain Cornell looked blank. Then sheepish smiles of comprehension dawned. Each shook his head.

"Well," said Frank, turning and pressing past Mr. Hampton, up the stairs. "This is the only two-story building in the neighborhood, and that means no other building overlooks the roof. It's just barely possible that we may find something of interest up there. I'm going to see."

"And I'll go with you," said Captain Cornell. "Mr. Hampton, will you please explain to the others who I see have gone on. Tell them we'll rejoin you shortly."

"Maybe there are some men hiding up there," Mr. Hampton said anxiously. "Be careful."

"Oh, we'll be careful, all right," said Captain Murray. "They won't take us off guard a second time."

"Well, I don't like it," said Mr. Hampton. "If there were only some way of getting a look at that roof without risk—"

But the others had re-ascended the stairs and were out of earshot.

CHAPTER XX.

DON FERDINAND EXPLAINS

THE trap door was on a slide, not hinged. This permitted of its being pushed back in grooves that proved to be well-oiled and noiseless. Frank who stood on a stool so high that he was forced to bow his head in order not to strike it against the low roof was about to straighten up and look out, when Captain Cornell thrust him aside. The next moment the doughty flyer, placing his hands on the edge of the opening, pulled himself up to the room. Frank was quick to follow.

"Hey, Captain, that was mean," he declared.

"Didn't want you poking into trouble," explained the other. "Feel that I owe it to Mr. Hampton. But our trouble's for nothing," he added, looking about, "unless—"

He ceased abruptly and leaped forward, Frank at his heels. Both had seen that shapeless bundle, looking like an old roll of carpet, begin to quiver. The roof was flat, a low parapet rimming it. In one corner lay the bundle, and the westering sun

in their eyes had so dazzled them at first that they had not seen it. But now—

They pulled up together beside the strange object, and Captain Cornell stirred it with a foot. "Come out," he commanded in Spanish, "and have a care. I am armed."

The faded carpet covering what they now could see was a man out-stretched his full length, quivered. But no man emerged.

"I'll cover him, Frank," said Captain Cornell. "Do you take off the carpet."

Frank seized an end of the carpet and tugged. But the carpet did not come away. Instead, the object beneath began to roll toward him. A man was rolled up inside. Once, twice, he turned over. Then the end of the carpet was reached, and the man lay exposed.

"By the ring-tailed caterpillar," cried Frank, using his wildest expletive. It's Don Ferdinand." And he flung himself on his knees, and began fumbling at the knotted rope wound 'round and 'round the form of his old acquaintance, who was trussed from head to heel. "Lend a hand, Captain. Or, wait, I'll cut those ropes." And he fished for his pocket knife, and getting it out, opened and began to slash the bonds. A moment later he desisted in order to pull away the huge bandanna knotted about the aristocratic Don Ferdinand's jaw

and efficiently stopping speech. The moment the gag was withdrawn, the old Don began to sputter.

"Hey, Captain," Frank cried excitedly, "run to the edge of the roof and call out to the fellows."

And as Captain Cornell hastened away to comply, Frank finished the task of releasing the Don and then assisted him to his feet. Don Ferdinand was so stiff from his bonds as to be unable to stand without assistance. But his tongue wasn't stiff. It rattled on at a great rate. Frank, whose Spanish was somewhat rusty from disuse, had difficulty in understanding, so voluble was the Don's speech. He knew, however, that his old friend was pouring vials of wrath on the head of the missing Ramirez; and he was tempted to smile, but by an effort managed to refrain.

In the mean time, he assisted Don Ferdinand to the open trap door, impressing on him that Ramirez had fled and that friends waited below. They were joined by Captain Cornell, who helped Frank lower the older man to the stool below. Thereupon the two followed, pulling the trap shut behind them. Captain Cornell urged haste.

"Let's get out of this and get back to our own land," he said. "We've rescued Don Ferdinand, thanks to you Frank. It would be a shame to get into trouble with the authorities now."

Frank agreed, and with a hand under Don Ferd-

inand's elbow hurried the frothing old aristocrat down the stairs. Not once did the latter cease his wrathy outpourings until they emerged on the street, where Mr. Hampton was first to greet them. But Captain Cornell interrupted the conversation between these two old friends before it could get well launched. He was impatient to be gone.

"We've had a lot of luck," he said, "but it may not last. I don't know what is the standing of this fellow Ramirez with the Mexican authorities. He may own the town, for all I know. Anyway, it would be a shame for us American officers to get into trouble over here now. Let's go."

They went. Somehow or other, the party which had come in the big car of the flyers and the Laredo taxicab, augmented now by the addition of Bob and Captain Cornell and Don Ferdinand, managed to swarm into the constricted space. It was a wild race for the Bridge, and so jounced about was everybody that ordered conversation was impossible.

"Pull up at the Hamilton, everybody," Mr. Hampton had said, on starting. "Then we can have a council of war and hear Don Ferdinand's story."

So, although the car containing the flyers, drew rapidly ahead, those in the taxi felt assured that they would all be reunited, provided they managed

to cross the International Bridge without running foul of the Mexican authorities. This they did, just ahead of the procession of cars coming from the bull fight. And in the lobby of the Hamilton, Don Ferdinand and his escorts found the men of the Border Patrol awaiting them.

"Whew," said Captain Murray, as they trooped into Mr. Hampton's sitting room, to the amazement of Mr. Temple who had spent the afternoon in a quiet siesta which their coming rudely routed; "that was a risky piece of business. We had no business invading Mexico, and if we had been caught at it by the authorities of Nueva Laredo we would have had to do some tall explaining. Glad it's over—and without exposure."

"I'll not forget, old man," said Captain Cornell.

"Rot." Murray playfully pulled the other's hat down over his eyes. "You'd do as much for any of us."

Around the big room they all found seats, the seven young aviators of the Border Patrol, the Hamptons, the Temples and Frank, many sitting on the floor. Don Ferdinand was given the seat of honor, a huge winged arm chair. Perhaps, he would prefer to rest after his trying experiences rather than to talk, suggested Mr. Hampton; in which case they would permit him to retire, and he could relate his story later. But the old aristocrat

waved that suggestion aside impatiently. He was filled with anger and eager to talk. Perhaps, too, added Mr. Hampton, he was hungry and would like to eat. But to that, too, the old Don said, no. Mr. Hampton did, however, ring for bottled ginger ale which when it arrived everybody eagerly seized.

Then with bottles in hand, they listened while Don Ferdinand explained how he had come to be in the predicament from which Frank and Captain Cornell had rescued him.

To begin with, Ramirez, as they already knew, had lured away a score of men from Don Ferdinand's mine in the mountains, many miles to the west. The old Don feared Ramirez was preparing to gather a rebel army and launch a new rebellion. At one time, nothing would have pleased Don Ferdinand better. But he believed now that the Obregon government was stabilizing his country, and he wanted its peace to continue undisturbed.

In that isolated district, there was only a shadow of Federal authority, in the form of a commander and a score of troops in a small town garrison at the village of San Dimas. Don Ferdinand decided that it would be useless to appeal to such help, for in the meantime Ramirez would move eastward unhampered and continually gathering more troops.

Accordingly, with his own followers at his back, he set out in pursuit.

Well mounted though they were, however, Don Ferdinand's command failed to catch up with Ramirez. Through sparsely settled country, where the only human inhabitants were a few lonely sheepherders, led the chase. Now and then Don Ferdinand obtained word of Ramirez's passing. Once, about fifty miles west of Nueva Laredo, they came upon a camp which Ramirez had made along the Rio Grande that was only a day old. The American town of Carana, a Texan village inhabited by Mexicans, was not far distant across the river. Then they pressed on toward Nueva Laredo, hopeful of meeting Ramirez before he could gain sufficient strength to attack the town.

But almost at once Don Ferdinand discovered that Ramirez no longer had with him the main body of his followers. Trail signs up to the last camp had indicated that more than a score of men rode with Ramirez. Now the signs showed that not more than four horsemen had proceeded from the last camp. They turned back at once in order to make a closer inspection of the camping place, and soon discovered that the score left behind had crossed the river in the direction of Carana, some three miles away.

This puzzled the old Don sadly. A dozen con-

jectures as to the reason for such a move whirled through his brain. The one most likely to be true, he believed, was that Ramirez had sent his main body along the deserted Texan shore toward Nueva Laredo while he and a few lieutenants approached it from the Mexican side. Many Mexicans live in Texas; and, therefore, the followers of Ramirez would be able to enter Laredo without detection and stay in the American town until they received word from their commander to enter Mexico. In the mean time, Ramirez could be preparing his plans in Nueva Laredo for a surprise attack that would put the town in his power. So Don Ferdinand pressed eagerly toward Nueva Laredo. He felt that this move would make the capture of Ramirez all the easier, and that with the brains of the revolution laid by the heels, there would be no revolution.

Five miles from Nueva Laredo, Don Ferdinand left his followers at the hacienda of a friend. Only one man did he take with him, whose duty it would be to act as messenger and summon the troop in case of need. He entered Nueva Laredo the next day and spent hours in making guarded inquiries.

No information. At least, none of value. Don Ferdinand had acquaintances in Nueva Laredo. His land-owning friend had others to whom he bore references. All knew of Ramirez and his

former reputation as a smuggler and bad character. None, however, had heard of any revolutionary movement with him behind it, and only one had heard of his being in Nueva Laredo. He had been seen on the street, somebody had dropped mention of it to this informant.

Don Ferdinand pressed his inquiries further. Believing Ramirez's command had crossed the Rio Grande fifty miles west in order to march into Laredo and there await word from their commander, he went to Laredo. A very good friend, a wealthy merchant, housed him. But inquiries made amid the lower strata of Laredo society by the merchant's employees brought forth no information regarding an influx of strangers who might be Ramirez's men. Then, driving across the International Bridge, Saturday night, Don Ferdinand in his friend's car caught sight of Ramirez, only to lose the chase, as already narrated, through his accidental smashing into the taxi of his young friends.

The next day was the morning of the bull fight. Remembering his promise to call at the Hamilton Hotel Don Ferdinand was preparing for the visit when word was brought him that Ramirez had been located in a house on Calle Libertad. The informant was one of his merchant-friend's employees—a laborer from the warehouse. He undertook

to guide Don Ferdinand to a dive in Nueva Laredo, where they were to meet one of Ramirez's men who had agreed to sell his information, if Don Ferdinand would buy. The merchant was asleep. Don Ferdinand did not wake him, but took the car which had been placed at his disposal and drove with his informant to the meeting place.

"It was a trick," he explained. "Barely had I entered the dive than I was seized from behind, gagged and then taken in my friend's car to the house in Calle Libertad."

"And Ramirez?" questioned Mr. Hampton.

"At the house he met me. Our conversation I shall not repeat. It would only bore you. But, Senor Hampton, my good friend, I must tell you I was mistaken. This devil Ramirez, he think he have me in his power and can tell me all. Ah, he does not realize I have good friends who will come to my rescue. What do you think, Senor? He says he does not make the revolution; there is no money in that. Instead, he organized a—what shall I call it?—system of men for smuggling Orientals out of Mexico into the Estados Unidos."

"An underground railway?" suggested Captain Cornell.

Don Ferdinand nodded.

"I was surprise'—me. He think, this devil Ramirez, it is I, Don Ferdinand, who want a share

in this traffic which is so profitable. He think it is because of that desire for money that I pursue him. So now he capture me."

Don Ferdinand's listeners betrayed the keenest interest. Captain Cornell was especially eager for details. His suspicions regarding Ramirez and the latter's projects were fulfilled. He wanted to know all. Questions poured upon Don Ferdinand in a flood, completely overwhelming him. At length he waved his hands impatiently.

"Senors, have a patience. There is little more to tell. This devil, Ramirez, he reveal that he take my man from the mine because he need men for his—what you call?—oh, yes, his 'underground railway. When he send them across Rio Grande, it is that they go to Carana and prepare. From Carana, these Orientals shall be sent to San Antonio and then distributed through Estados Unidos."

"But didn't he have other men?" asked Mr. Hampton. "Why should he go west to your mine, and take your men? Why should he take my cook Ramon?"

"About thees Ramon, I do not know. But Ramirez, he take my men because he know I shall pursue. Me, he have a grudge against this long time."

CHAPTER XXI.

ON RAMIREZ'S TRAIL.

JACK had been listening but at the same time his thoughts had been busy with conjectures. To him, it did not seem likely that Ramirez had laid his plans solely in order that he might lure Don Ferdinand into his power. Some other motive there must be. And his thoughts leaped to Rafaela. With the departure of her father and the major portion of his men, she would be left with but slim protection in her mountain fastness. Was it possible that Ramirez had deliberately planned affairs so that she should be left defenceless? He could not understand why this supposition occurred to him, not realizing that Rafaela was in the background of all his thoughts of late to a greater extent than he appreciated; but occur it did. And now he remembered, too, that when leaving home to fly to Laredo, he had been unable to gain a response to his radio calls to Rafaela.

Was it possible that already evil had befallen her? A sudden fear clutched at his heart. The others

were talking among themselves, excitedly. Snatches of their conversation informed Jack that the aviators of the Border Patrol were discussing this turn of events and what it would mean for them, inasmuch as it placed in their possession the clew to a traffic in human contraband which would have to be broken up. Don Ferdinand for the moment no longer occupied the center of attention, and Jack, noting this, slipped around behind his chair and leaning over the back of the chair, addressed him in a low voice.

The old man listened a moment and then looked up startled, while over his features came an expression of alarm. He half started out of his chair.

"Jack, I am the fool," he said. "That devil Ramirez, he have seen my daughter two-three month ago at the fiesta and have try to kees her. My men, they have beat him. He nurses revenge. It is for that revenge I think he try to get me in his power. But, no, it is that he may carry off my daughter while I am away. Fool, fool," he cried, and struck his head with his clenched fist. Then his eyes brightened.

"But, no, Jack. If he want to carry off my daughter, why is he here?"

"I thought of that, too," replied Jack. "But maybe he is trying to combine business with pleasure. While he conducts his smuggling operations, and lures you out of the way in pursuit of him, some

lieutenant may be swooping down and carrying Rafaela away."

Don Ferdinand frowned, twisting his mustaches ferociously. "He is a devil. He is smart as Satan himself. Perhaps, it is that you are right, Jack."

Jack persisted. "Look here, Don Ferdinand. This fellow Ramirez had a band with him before he took your men away from the mine, didn't he? Well, if he took a score from you, and that's about all he brought this way with him, he must have left others behind in the mountains. He—"

"Enough, Jack. You are right." Don Ferdinand leaped to his feet. "Fool, fool," he cried again, once more striking his head.

At this gesture and outburst the others gained their feet and gathered around the pair, demanding to know what was the matter. As briefly as he could, Jack explained. In conclusion he added that so far as he could see, the first thing to do was to get into communication with Don Ferdinand's ranch. Radio was the only means. Therefore, he would have to go at once to the flying field in order to call the ranch station.

The big fellow was dismayed. His handsome features were flushed. And his father, knowing more than the others of how Jack's affections were involved, moved to his side and threw an arm across his shoulders.

"Easy, son," he said. "If Ramirez intended to carry off Rafaela, he would have boasted of it to Don Ferdinand when he had our friend in his power."

"Maybe so, Dad," said Jack. "On the other hand, Ramirez might have been saving up that choice bit of information for a denouement. Anyhow, I think the best thing to do is to try and get in touch with Rafaela at once."

"If you can't get an answer, Jack," Frank suggested, "suppose we fly out there in your plane."

At that Captain Cornell shook his head. "It'll be dark in another two hours," he said. "And you couldn't get started under an hour from now. The flight would take three hours. It would be folly to make the trip in your plane, Jack. You may know all that country well, but landing at night is a very different matter from making a daylight landing. If you were forced down, hm!" He shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands in an eloquent gesture.

"There's a landing field at Don Ferdinand's," Jack expostulated. "And nothing would go wrong that would force me down between here and there."

"You never can tell," said Captain Cornell. "Besides," he added, turning to the others, "we have something else to think about. Don Ferdinand," he added, addressing the latter directly, "you were in

that house longer than I. Besides, Ramirez boasted to you of what he was planning to do. Now I saw numerous pallets there, indicating that a good many Orientals had slept there only recently. Did Ramirez reveal what had become of them and when he intended to try to smuggle them over the Border?"

"They were taken out of Nueva Laredo last night," said Don Ferdinand. "That much, he tell me. One was stabbed in a fight, but could walk. They are walking toward Carana."

"Not on horseback?"

"No. And he say, this devil Ramirez, that he will put them across the Rio Grande tonight," Don Ferdinand added.

"Boys," said Captain Cornell, decisively. "That means work for us."

The members of the Border Patrol nodded, their eyes bright. All but Captain Murray. "But Ramirez knows we'll be on his trail," he objected. "He knows we're in it. Otherwise, Cornell, why did he capture you?"

"Huh. He was in that crowd in Nueva Laredo last night, when Don Ferdinand and the boys and I got together. Saw me stop Don Ferdinand and bring him back. Then he turned around and mixed in with the crowd. So he knew Don Ferdinand and I were acquainted. When he saw me examining his auto, out there in front of his house, or rather, Don

Ferdinand's stolen auto, he socked me. But—he doesn't know I'm an aviator, or that you fellows who came to my rescue are aviators. I guess he's still trying to figure out how you came to the rescue."

Captain Murray's brow cleared. "Good. Then he doesn't know that the Border Patrol is on his trail. What a sweet surprise we'll spring on him at Carana. We'll take your ship and mine. I'll telephone the field to warm 'em up—and they'll be ready when we arrive."

He turned to the room telephone. Jack halted him. "Tell them to warm my ship up, too, Captain, please," he begged. "If I can't get Don Ferdinand's daughter by radio, I'll have to fly over there."

"One hundred and fifty miles," interrupted Captain Cornell. "And dark in little more than an hour from now. You can't do it, Jack. Night-flying is nothing for an inexperienced man to undertake."

"We'll see," said Jack. "Anyway, you have my ship warmed up for me, please, Captain Murray."

Leaving the room abruptly, with the remark that he would return in a short time, Jack went toward his own room on the same floor. A gabble of voices floated upstairs from the lobby, where the bull fight of the afternoon was under discussion. Frank and Bob, true comrades, followed him.

"What you going to do, Jack?"

"Get a sweater and helmet." Jack's lips set in a grim line.

"If you go, we're going with you."

"We'll talk about that later. Thanks, though, fellows."

As they returned, the aviators were emerging into the hall. With them were Mr. Hampton, Mr. Temple and Don Ferdinand, all wearing anxious faces.

"Here he is," cried Captain Cornell. "Listen, Jack. We've decided what to do."

The two groups faced each other.

"It wouldn't do, Jack, it wouldn't do at all, for you to fly in your boat to Don Ferdinand's. Your boat is all right, I know, a peach of a little craft. But it isn't equipped with a searchlight, and it's too frail to be trusted in a forced night landing. Besides, you haven't any experience in night-flying. So if it seems necessary to make a flight to Don Ferdinand's, you and I'll go in a De Haviland."

Jack's face which had been growing more and more set in a grim look of determination, lightened materially. "Oh, say, Captain, that'll be fine," he said. "You're a white man." And he gripped the other's hand.

"Hm!" Captain Cornell grunted. "Come on, we're all going out to the field. The fellows have

their car at the door, and we've ordered a couple of taxis."

In the hotel lobby, the group attracted considerable attention from the various groups of old-timers and tourists scattered about. Jack Hannaford, the old ex-Ranger, huge, grizzled, mustached, strode up to Captain Cornell.

"Howdy," he cried. Then in a lower voice, he added: "Looks like trouble for somebody, when doggone near the whole Laredo flight of the Border Patrol puts its heads together. Got something you can let me in on?"

The others were going on. Captain Cornell was tempted to tell Hannaford of the expedition that was afoot. He liked the old Ranger. No harm could be done by it. On the other hand, nothing was to be gained. And his companions were waiting for him.

"Yes, a little expedition up the river, Hannaford," he said. "I'm in a hurry. Excuse me now, and I'll tell you about it later."

Hannaford stepped closer and dropped his voice still lower. "Is it about Ramirez?" he asked. "You was asking 'bout him yestiddy, you know."

"Ramirez?" gasped Captain Cornell. "Yes, Hannaford, it is. What do you know about him?"

"Nothing much," said Hannaford, in a deceptively indifferent voice. "Only I know where he is."

"You know where he is."

"Uh. Doc Garfield jist telephoned me, right here in the lobby, that he got Ramirez in his office. The duck come in with a bullet through his arm. Broken. Wanted it set."

"Hampton's bullet did that. Doc Garfield? Where? Here in Laredo?"

"Uh-huh. Down near the Bridge."

"Great guns." The excited Captain Cornell stared incredulously at his informant. "Why'd this doctor call you?"

"Good friend o' mine. Knows I got a grudge to settle with Ramirez. Wanted to know if there was any warrant out for him. Doc Garfield, he's an old-timer. Knows these Border ruffians, most of 'em, by sight, anyways."

"And you told him—"

"Tol' him? What could I tell him? Tol' him they was no warrants out that I knew of. But I was on my way to light out for Garfield's when I see you come inta the lobby. Jist hung up the 'phone."

"Hannaford, listen. No, wait a minute. My friends must hear of this. Oh, shucks, come with me. That's the best way."

Captain Cornell seized the old ex-Ranger by an arm and half-urged, half-drew him out of the lobby to the street.

CHAPTER XXII.

TO THE RESCUE.

Two taxicabs and the big touring car from the aviation field, his friends in them and anxious to go, stood at the curb as Captain Cornell with Hannaford beside him, came down the steps.

"Snap into it, Cornell," called Captain Murray, impatiently. "Get into one of the taxis. We're loaded."

He stepped on the starter and the big car began to roar. Captain Cornell cleared the sidewalk in one jump, and landed on the running board. "Stop your engine. I've got news."

"News?"

"You bet." The excited Captain Cornell turned toward the two taxis and waved their occupants to approach. The three boys who were in the nearer taxi were by his side in a moment, for they sensed from his manner that he had something important to divulge. The three older men who were in the farther taxi were slower to approach. Yet they, too, hurried their pace on noting Captain Cornell's air of suppressed excitement.

"Fellows," he said, low-voiced, as the tense group gathered around him and Hannaford, "I know where Ramirez is. And we're going for him right away."

Quickly he explained what Hannaford had just revealed to him.

"And don't worry none about bein' legal," said Hannaford. "I'm a deputy sheriff, and bein' as how you got somethin' on Ramirez which makes it all right for us to go after him, I'll swear you all in as members o' my posse."

"All right, Hannaford, step on it," said Captain Murray. "Climb in with us, and show us the way."

Hannaford was bundled into the foremost car, Captain Cornell joined the boys in the first taxi, and both cars got off to an almost equal start. That bearing Mr. Hampton and Mr. Temple and Don Ferdinand was slower in getting under way, but kept the others in sight.

"This shoulder of mine has felt better in its time," grunted Mr. Hampton to his companions. "I planned to wait until we got to the flying field, where I could have the flight surgeon examine and treat it, and wouldn't have to make embarrassing explanations. But, maybe, this Doctor Garfield can fix me up."

Several minutes later found the three cars drawn

up together on a deserted side street near the International Bridge. Hannaford had called a halt. Doctor Garfield's home and office lay in the next block, and the old ex-Ranger felt it was necessary to prepare a plan of campaign before going farther.

"Doc Garfield was in a hurry when he phoned," said Hannaford. "I know where his phone is—in a little room separated from his office. He was speaking low and hurried, while Ramirez waited. Doc couldn't tell me much, only that Ramirez come in a car which he left standing at the curb, and he thinks there's a woman in the car and a couple or three men."

"This doctor, his office it is in the next block?" asked Don Ferdinand. Jack Hannaford nodded. "It grows dusk," said the old Don, "but," he added, in a tone of conviction, "but I am certain that ees my friend's car I see." He pointed.

Twilight had come. Purple dusk lay over the quiet street. Graceful pepper trees lining the curbing enhanced the shadows beneath them. Yet it was not so dark but what those who had seen it before felt pretty certain that the car parked at the opposite curb in the next block was that borrowed from his friend by Don Ferdinand and stolen from the latter by Ramirez. The shadows were growing deeper, yet the lines of the car and the occasional

glimmer of polished trimmings could not be mistaken. Hannaford gave confirmation.

"That's where Doc Garfield's house is."

"Look here," said Jack, taking the initiative. "We've got the advantage of surprise. They won't be expecting us. Let's dash up beside them, and demand their surrender. We'll be on them before they can know what is happening. Mr. Hannaford, who knows the house, can lead a group inside in a dash that ought to bag Ramirez without trouble, especially as he's got a busted arm."

Nobody could suggest any better plan.

"Furthermore," said Jack, addressing the aviators, "the car you fellows are driving better fall to the rear. Ramirez's men have seen it."

Arrangements were quickly made, a number of aviators transferring to the taxi previously occupied by the older men, while Captain Cornell took his place in that occupied by the three boys. One was to range up alongside the stolen car, the other to draw up behind it, whereupon its occupants could pile out and take the gangsters on the other side. As for Hannaford and his group, who were to enter the house, they were to go up a side street and approach from the rear.

"Ramirez may see what's going on out front, and take to his heels out the back door," said Hannaford. "If he does, we'll bag him."

This arrangement was satisfactory to everybody except the three older men. Mr. Hampton was regretful because his wounded shoulder would keep him out of action. Mr. Temple was plainly nervous and disinclined to have the boys running into danger. And Don Ferdinand bounced up and down, demanding a revolver, so that he could take a hand in the fray. But there was none to spare, and he and his two companions were to stay in the aviators' car. As for the drivers of the two rented taxis, they were not without experience in affrays of one sort and another in this tempestuous community, and their fares were sufficient guarantee that they would be compensated for any damages sustained. Moreover, they knew Jack Hannaford, whose word with them was law.

"Let's go," said Captain Cornell, impatiently.

The discussion of details, quickly though the latter had been arranged, had consumed several minutes. Dusk was deepening. Jumping into the leading taxi, Captain Cornell seated himself beside the driver, a position which fortunately would put him next to the car ahead. The boys were in the rear compartment, Jack crouching by the door and ready to throw it open and leap out at the crucial moment.

In such tense moments, it is emotion, not reason, which sways one. Certainly, Jack was in the grip

of strong emotion. Certainly, the others were, too, as they bore down upon the car ahead. But how different in every case! Jack was filled with rage bordering upon despair as he thought of the possibility that Rafaela might have come to harm through the machinations of Ramirez. His whole idea was to lay hands on Ramirez at the earliest possible moment and to choke the truth out of him, to force him to confess where he had hidden Rafaela, if he or his lieutenants had stolen her from her home during her father's absence. To none of the others, except Rafaela's father, no, not even to Jack's two comrades, did the affair appear in the same light as to him. They likewise were stirred by emotions, but only such as are incident to men hunting a criminal, in whose evil-doing their own personal fortunes or the fortunes of dear ones are not involved.

Only a very brief space of time was required to cover the ground intervening between the last halting place and the field of action, and, before the two taxis closed on the car ahead, the big car from the aviation field, under command of Jack Hannaford, swung into the intervening cross street. Mr. Hampton, who was among its occupants, shook his head as he lost sight of his son. He knew, if nobody else did, how Jack was shaken emotionally.

Hannaford pointed and, at his accompanying

word of command, the young aviator at the wheel swung the car to the curb. Then the grizzled old Texan and the aviator—it was young Haricourt, who had been detailed to this task—leaped out. Quickly he outlined his plan.

They were at the mouth of an alley running along the rear of Doctor Garfield's house. Hannaford and young Harincourt would enter the house from the rear. Mr. Hampton, Mr. Temple and Don Ferdinand were to keep guard at the alley's mouth. If Ramirez escaped Hannaford and came down the alley, it would be their job to pot him. Don Ferdinand, raging, protested. He wanted to be in the forefront.

"Two's enough," said Hannaford brusquely. "More would git in their own way. You stay here. Come on, lad."

And with Harincourt at his heels, the old ex-Ranger darted up the deserted narrow alley, in which the shadows were deepening at the near approach of night, as briskly as a boy.

Mr. Hampton shook his head in admiration, a little smile on his lips.

"A tough breed," he commented.

In the meantime, up the shadowy street in front of the house, with its air of Sabbath calm, sped the two taxis, while peal on peal of bells from the tower of a nearby church floated down on the still

air. What irony, thought Jack, church bells and he and his comrades speeding on such a mission! Yet their mission was of the best, he comforted himself.

And then all thought except of the matter in hand fled, crouching against the door, ready to fling it open and spring out, his eyes, just tipping the rim of the panelled glass, beheld the other car at the curb, ahead, abreast. Now, now. As the brakes squeaked, and the taxi ground to a stop so suddenly as to fling all its occupants about, Jack thrust the door outward and sprang upon the running board of the other car, pistol in hand. Beside him was Captain Cornell, leaping down from the driver's side, and at his back Bob and Frank, crowding close.

But what was this revealed in the depths of that other car? What, but one man struggling desperately yet unavailingly in the grasp of another? And of a third man cowering in a corner, with his upflung arms protecting his face, while over him bent a fury in woman's clothes, one hand gripped in his hair and the other reaching talon-like for his features?

Ramon, the Hamptons' old cook, face distorted. "Senor Jack, queek or he escape. I—cannot—hold —heem—"

And then Captain Cornell's pistol butt falling on the head of him whom Ramon clasped, and the

other lying still and Ramon rising to his knees with a sob of thankfulness.

And then, wonder of wonders, the fury faced about, and it was Rafaela. Rafaela, her face appearing as through a mist to Jack's unbelieving eyes. And quick as thought he threw an arm about her and drew her close, while all the fighting fury which had nerved her to the attack went out of her, and she collapsed with a little trembling cry. And Bob and Frank, over there, on the other side of the car—though how they got there was a mystery to Jack!—sitting on the form of the ruffian whom Rafaela had faced and outfaced and at their back, only half-seen in the growing darkness, the other aviators from the second taxi.

"Is it all over? Anybody hurt?" the young aviators demanded.

But Jack could think of nothing except that here was Rafaela whom he had thought far away, and safe in his arms, when he had feared she was in Ramirez's power. Safe in his arms—

For the first time he was aware of the broad grins upon the faces of his two comrades, and the scarcely less-pronounced smiles of his Border Patrol friends. He knew the reason, but he merely pressed Rafaela tighter in the circle of his arm. It was she who pulled away, with a "Thank you, Senor, but I can stand now." And then—they

were now in the street between car and taxi—the little witch must needs add, as if utterly surprised, "Oh, it is you, Jack." And Jack, looking no more foolish than he felt, could only add, "Yes, it's I. Who—who did you think it was?"

The grins became broader, someone laughed. Rafaela only shrugged.

Across the embarrassment cut Captain Cornell's voice. "Tie 'em up, boys, and into the house, quick."

"Oh, but, Senor, not Ramon," protested Rafaela, facing the group about the volubly expostulating cook. The two other captives were sullen and silent. "He have been of a help to me."

"Senor Jack," Ramon held out supplicating hands.

Jack hesitated, but the old cook's appeal coupled with a glance from Rafaela decided him. "I'll answer for Ramon," he said.

And Bob, remembering the old cook's recalcitrance toward Ramirez outside the bull ring that afternoon—was it only a few short hours before?—spoke up with, "He's all right. Let's beat it into the house."

A swirl and a whoop, a patter of running feet, and away dashed the others, up the walk toward Doctor Garfield's house behind a wide lawn. The two hastily yet securely-trussed captives lay on the

sidewalk, with Ramon leering about them, lighting a cigarette. The taxi driver looked down interestedly from his seat at the two young people standing so close to each other between his cab and the other car.

"Aw, rats," he muttered, but grinning as he spoke the words. "Ain't they the sweet young things."

Then he climbed down stiffly and walked around on the other side of his taxi to talk to his brother chauffeur in the other car.

CHAPTER XXIII.

RAMON TALKS

THE rest can be briefly told. When the reserves, so to speak, entered Doctor Garfield's office, they found Ramirez already captive in Hannaford's clutches. The Mexican had been in the act of departing, he was, in fact, already at the front door, his hand on the knob, when the old Texan from the rear had commanded him to surrender.

Don Ferdinand, raging, had broken away from the restraint of Mr. Hampton and Mr. Temple, and had followed in the wake of Hannaford and young Harincourt. He stood, trembling with passion, in front of Ramirez, as the aviators under Captain Cornell, and ably supported by Bob and Frank, appeared in the doorway of the office.

"My daughter?" he was demanding, shaking his fist under Ramirez's nose. "Where is my daughter?"

And the latter, his evil eyes gleaming from his swarthy face, was leering down at the smaller man.

"Where you cannot find her," he was saying, for

he believed that his shout of warning, emitted as Hannaford captured him, had been heard and heeded by the captors of Rafaela who were in the car outside.

But the malicious triumph that shone from his eyes departed when his attention was drawn by the loud trampling of feet in the hall and he swung around to face newcomers in the doorway. If these were more Americans from the front of the house, it was likely that his men had been captured and Rafaela rescued, was the thought that followed. And this suspicion of the downfall of his rascality was confirmed when Bob stepped up to Don Ferdinand.

"Don't believe him, sir," said the big fellow. "Your daughter is safe outside. Jack is with her."

The last words fell on unheeding ears. Don Ferdinand went through the crowd and out the hall like an arrow.

Much had been done, but something still remained. Ramirez and several of his lieutenants had been captured, and Rafaela rescued. But a score of Ramirez's followers were still at large, and the large band of Orientals whom Ramirez was smuggling into the United States in defiance of the immigration laws would have to be rounded up before the Border Patrol would consider its efforts a complete success.

"You see, it's this way," Captain Cornell hurriedly explained to Jack and his comrades; "the new immigration law which is under discussion in Congress right now proposes a practically complete ban of Orientals. Few enough have been admitted heretofore, the majority being permitted to enter under a so-called gentlemen's agreement, and posing as students. Well, some have been students, but certainly not all.

"Now," he added, "if you are not familiar with what is going on, I can tell you that our government is preparing to frame a law which will make it impossible for Orientals to enter our country. There have been frequent rumors of late to the effect that the Orientals were leaving their crowded home lands and migrating to Mexico, where there is no ban against them, in large numbers. Doubtless, Ramirez, who has a head on his shoulders, even if he does use it only for rascality, and who keeps abreast of the times, saw his opportunity in this situation. He has planned an 'underground railway' for running Orientals out of Mexico and into the United States. There used to be a traffic in the same sort of human contraband on the Pacific Coast, until it was broken up a few years ago. But," he interrupted, surprised, "why these knowing looks at each other?"

His listeners laughed. "You tell him, Jack," said Bob.

"Well, Captain," said Jack, "you may not believe it, but we three happened to have a hand in breaking up that traffic. And a sweet time we had of it, too, for a while. By accident, we stumbled on something in San Francisco which made us dangerous to the Smuggling Ring. They kidnapped us and took us to sea. But we managed to escape and to bring the government forces down on their hiding place in the Santa Barbara Channel islands. Fellows," he added, addressing Bob and Frank, "do you remember that inventor—Professor What's-his-name, and his radio finder for locating uncharted stations? That's how we managed to find the hiding place, Captain, through locating their radio calls between a shore station and their boats."

"Those were the happy days," said Bob reminiscently, and a faraway look came into his eyes as his thoughts turned back to the exciting events narrated in The Radio Boys on Secret Service Duty.

Frank nodded. "Lots of fun," he said.

Captain Cornell threw up his hands in mock dismay, as he laughed. "You three must be regular trouble-finders," he commented. "Do you always get into the thick of things like this?"

"Oh, not always," said Jack. And Bob grumbled:

"Thick of things? Huh. We aren't in the thick of things this time. You fellows flying to Carana are going to get the cream of the whole affair."

The conversation had been conducted in undertones. All four were standing on the outskirts of the group in Doctor Garfield's office, which was brilliantly lighted while in one corner Captain Murray, finding he could obtain little information from the sullen Ramirez, was now pumping Ramon. Don Ferdinand had taken Rafaela to the home of his merchant friend, and the boys were to call on them on the morrow. Doctor Garfield had re-dressed Mr. Hampton's wound, and the latter had departed for the hotel, accompanied by Mr. Temple, for the express purpose of trying to locate the owner of the flivver which Bob and Captain Cornell had made off with outside of the Nueva Laredo bull ring that afternoon, in their pursuit of Ramirez, and of reimbursing him.

The other aviators were listening to Captain Murray's attempt to obtain information from Ramon. Presently the latter turned away impatiently, and, his eyes lighting on Jack, he beckoned him forward.

"Hampton, I can't get anything out of your old cook. You try your hand."

"Look here, Ramon," said Jack, eyeing the old fellow keenly. "You're afraid of something. You know you'll not be prosecuted. You did us too good a turn outside for that. Now what is it? Tell me. Are you"—and he leaned closer, whispering so that only Ramon could hear—"afraid of what Ramirez may do if you betray any information about his plans?"

"Si, Senor," breathed Ramon.

Jack in turn whispered to Captain Murray. The latter frowned thoughtfully for a second or two, then his eyes brightened, and he turned to Hannaford. The other stooped from his greater height, and the three put their heads together. The other Americans regarded them curiously. As for Ramirez he continued to glower while from beneath his lowered lids darted a poisonous glance which fell on Ramon and made the old fellow tremble.

"Come on, you," said Hannaford, at length, turning to Ramirez; "we'll just put you where you won't be no trouble to anybody but yourself."

With a hand as big as a ham gripping the more slightly built Mexican, Hannaford marched him outside and flung him into one of the taxicabs.

"Where to, Jack?"

"County jail. Step on 'er."

Behind them, in the office, already Ramon was growing brighter, with Ramirez away. And now

he no longer hesitated to answer questions, for Jack assured him that Ramirez would be sent to the Federal Penitentiary for violation of a national law, and that years would elapse before he would ever be free again.

"Senor Jack," said Ramon, addressing Jack in Spanish, "you ask yourself why Ramon abandons you at the ranch? Ah, you do not know, you do not know that devil's power? Once I was a bandit; that was years ago. Then I went to the Estados Unidos and became respectable. Senor, when I go to the village that day to buy supplies for our ranch, two lieutenants of Ramirez encounter me. Aye, Senor, those same two—Andreas and Jose—whom I fight and overcome in the car, myself, alone, single-handed, as you arrive."

He thumped his chest, and Jack with difficulty restrained a burst of laughter. From behind him, where the others crowded close, came a tittering which betrayed that others were not so heedful of the old man's feelings. But Ramon paid them no heed.

"Andreas and Jose tell me they have a fine job for me, Senor Jack, and when I decline and inform them I already have the fine job, they compel me to go with them. Of a certainty, I, Ramon, would have fought them then, except that they were armed while I had not even a knife.

"We get in the train, Senor, and we ride to Laredo. And then they take me to that house you know of, where they make me cook for thousands of stinking Orientals. And, Senor, Ramirez, he laugh at me."

The old man bowed his head in shame, and this time no laughter came from the men crowding close behind Jack. The latter dropped a kindly hand on Ramon's bowed shoulders.

"It's all over now, Ramon, and he shall never get you in his clutches again," Jack promised. "And now," he added, at an impatient whisper from Captain Murray, "tell us where the Orientals are, and how they are to be brought into the United States."

"Senor, tonight at midnight, they are to be at a point forty miles west, on the Rio Grande. A rough trail leads there, and it is wild country. At midnight, boats will meet them and they will be ferried across the river from Mexico into Texas. Guides will take them to Carana, where they will be housed until tomorrow night, when they will be sent on to San Antonio. There are no Americans at Carana, Senor, only Mexicans; and the whole town, which is not large, is in Ramirez's pay or, else, fears him and keeps silent."

And once more Ramon ceased speaking, while his hands went patting here and there about his person, but without success, until one of the avi-

ators with a smile stopped his fruitless search by thrusting a packet of cigarettes into his hand. The old man gratefully accepted one, lighted it, and sat back, puffing.

Captain Murray walked to an open window and looked out. Then he turned back with a decisive set to his shoulders.

"As calm a night as one could desire," he said to his confrere, Captain Cornell. "Three hours to midnight. And we could reach Carana in less than an hour. I know the village. Nobody there to telephone to, nobody to put on guard. What say?"

"You've landed there, haven't you?"

"Yes. In bright moonlight like this, there's no chance to miss it. A little settlement where the river takes that big bend to the north. Several good fields nearby. And in this flood of moonlight, landing ought to be easy."

All were listening closely, and the atmosphere was tense.

"If those Orientals once get into Texas, they'll be as hard to round up as jackrabbits."

"Yes, and if we break up Ramirez's gang, there'll be no boats for the Orientals to cross in."

"Just what I was thinking. Three ships ought to be enough, two in each."

"Right. I'll telephone the field to warm 'em up." And Captain Murray turned to white-haired old

Doctor Garfield, who like the others, had been an interested listener, and asked him for the location of his telephone. The Doctor silently threw open a door, and switched on the light in the next room, and Captain Murray sat down to the phone.

CHAPTER XXIV.

JACK SURRENDERS TO THE "ENEMY."

ANYBODY strolling into the dining room of the Hamilton Hotel after the dinner hour three nights later would have seen an amusing sight. The big room was being prepared as if for another dinner, when, as everybody knew, the regular diners had all been and departed. Nevertheless, instead of waiters clearing the tables and porters mopping up, here were the employees of the fashionable caterer of the town directing the waiters in assembling the tables down the center of the room into one long table, some putting on snowy linen and setting out silver and plate and flowers, others placing banks of flowers along the walls.

Rangy old Jack Hannaford, looking vastly different and uncomfortable in black coat and white collar, peered into the room and then precipitately withdrew. In his retreat he bumped into several other old-timers, likewise bent upon viewing the metamorphosis of the dining room, and they chaffed him unmercifully.

"Look at him all duded up."

"Wouldn'ta knowed ye, Jack."

"Huh. That ain't Jack Hannaford. That's a undertaker. Where's the corpse?"

"It's you that is mistaken. He's the corp himself. See how white he is."

This last witticism drew a roar of appreciative laughter.

"Think ye're smart, don't ye?" said Jack, beginning with dignity and ending in companionable mirth. "Waal, fellers, I look like I feel."

Jack was going to the "party." So were seven spruce young men in white ducks donned by command invitation instead of their hot uniforms, who entered the lobby at that moment. The foremost saw Hannaford and hailed him, and the old Texan at once deserted his tormentors to join the newcomers.

"Le's sit down, boys," invited Hannaford, "nobody but ourselves ain't come yet."

With comfortable sighs, all eight sank into chairs which were drawn in a semi-circle. Jack looked around the group. None of the aviators with whom he had shared the honor of Ramirez's capture and the rounding-up and scattering of the Smuggling Band was absent.

"Ain't seen you since that night, Captain," said Hannaford, his deep voice booming as he sought

ineffectually to modulate it, and addressing himself to Captain Cornell. "We got a minute's time before the party begins. 'Lay 'er out for me. What happened?"

So then Hannaford was told of how three De Havilands, each with its crew of two men, had gone cruising through the moonlight of that memorable night, high above the silvery reaches of the Rio Grande, to a landing near Carana; how there the members of the Border Patrol, commandeering a battered flivver, had piled into it and departed down river in time to round up a full dozen of Ramirez's band before ever a boat had put out across the river for the purpose of transferring the Orientals into the United States, and had sent the others flying.

"You know the rest, Jack," said Captain Cornell. "The fellows that we rounded up were all Mexicans lured from Don Ferdinand's mine by Ramirez with specious promises of the much gold they would receive. They're still in jail, but I expect that Uncle Sam will make it easy for them, inasmuch as they were not caught in the act and as they had not yet brought Orientals into the country. Besides, Don Ferdinand needs them back at his mine, and he and the Mexican Consul are making representations which ought to carry weight. How about Ramirez?"

"With him and his two lieutenants," Hannaford said, "it's some different. We got enough on 'em to hang 'em. And good riddance, too, if it could really be done—but it cain't."

Captain Cornell laughed. "You bloodthirsty old villain."

But Hannaford did not even smile. "I know him, you don't. Listen, let me tell you, it's a mighty good thing them boys took a hand."

"They're the real stuff, Jack," Captain Cornell agreed heartily, and his companion nodded. "The real stuff," he said. "But, say, Jack, what's the reason for their giving us this party tonight?"

Hannaford looked mysterious but confessed ignorance. "Only," he added, "don't fool yourselves none. This party ain't bein' give for us, or I miss my reckonin.' We're only the lookers-on."

"Great guns," cried Captain Cornell, half rising from his chair, and gasing toward the doorway. "Look who's here."

All eyes followed his gaze. And, truly, the vision entering the lobby was worth attention. It was Rafaela, leaning on her father's arm, but a Rafaela so gloriously beautiful and so quaintly dressed in Spanish costume—or was it merely a touch here and there, such as the lacy black mantilla, which made her costume appear so much more picturesque than that of the more Americanized

beauties who followed her?—that she took away the collective breath of the entire group.

Across the lobby Don Ferdinand, impeccably clad in dinner clothes, saw the standing group of aviators clustered about Jack Hannaford, and with a word to Rafaela, he made his way toward them. And then while the aviators gallantly professed themselves captivated, and while Rafaela and her attendant beauties blushed and bowed as prettily as ladies of the Sixties, introductions finally were achieved. Strangely enough, there was a beauty for each, with a handful left over. Even Jack Hannaford, confirmed old bachelor, groaned inwardly, as he saw a duenna—the counterpart of Donna Ana, Jack could have told him—being gently maneuvred his way.

And Jack, where was he? And Bob and Frank? Ah, there! Coming down the stair; at their heels, Mr. Hampton and Bob's father. Nor could any of the group, watching the approach across the lobby, guess that for the last hour tall, curley-haired Jack Hampton had been dressing with more painstaking preparations than he had ever bestowed on this operation before in his life. Nor could any have guessed that during that time he had been the target of unmerciful chaffing on the part of his chums—until at length he had attempted to expel them from his room, and a tussle had ensued, and he had been

compelled at the end to undertake dressing all over again, for it had left him a ghastly ruin.

No, none of these things could have been surmised from his appearance. For, fortunately, he had not yet donned dinner jacket and vest when the tussle had begun.

A merry clatter of voices rose as the two parties met and mingled, only to be temporarily stilled when Mr. Hampton announced that they would move into the dining room. So in they poured, each gallant aviator doing his best to be a ladies' man, with a Creole beauty on his arm, and Bob and Frank in the same case, while Jack walked beside Rafaela and neither spoke a word, yet eyes were far more eloquent than any speech could have been. And last of all came the three elders of the party—while the fourth, the real elder of all, old Jack Hannaford, strode fiercely just ahead of them, with the duenna's fingers resting on his high-crooked arm.

The room was a blaze of light. The decorations miraculously had all been arranged. And down the center, under its canopy of snowy linen, with the silver gleaming and sparkling, ran the long table. Place cards? Yes, here they were. And amid much laughter the various couples found their places.

Then silence, while Mr. Hampton at the head of the table, looking impressive and yet mischievous, lifted his glass—of sparkling grape juice.

"Friends," he said, "under other circumstances, the announcement I am about to make would come in an utterly different way. But the people involved—oh, yes, there are people involved—lead such scatterbrain lives that the customary manner of announcing engagements must be a bit scatterbrained, too."

Bob and Frank, standing beside their partners across the table from Jack, looked pointedly at him and Rafaela, grinning widely the while. And in the little pause following Mr. Hampton's last words, the aviators who had been unaware of what was coming and felt sadly puzzled, caught the significance of that glance. Jack tried to grin back manfully, but it was what his two comrades privately considered a sickly attempt. As for Rafaela, she looked as demure and unconcerned as if not she, but some other of the beautiful girls nodding to her with parted lips, was about to be named.

"I ask you to drink," cried Mr. Hampton, "to my son and his affianced bride."

There, the secret was a secret no longer. And in the hubbub that followed, with girls crowding around Rafaela, and the men about Jack, telling him what a lucky fellow he was, the dinner bade fair to be forgotten.

But suddenly a waiter wearing an anxious frown

appeared at Mr. Hampton's elbow, apologetically but firmly pleading for a hearing.

"It's that crazy fella you says must be master of ceremonies," he said. "He says you must go on with the dinner or it will be spoiled. He's out there in the kitchen, tearin' around like wild. I says no good would come of havin' one o' these Spanish chefs in the kitchen, bossin' everybody. There," pointing toward the kitchen door—"there he is now."

Mr. Hampton, lips quirked in a smile, let his gaze travel down the room. In the kitchen door, outlined against the gleaming ranges beyond, stood a figure, arms akimbo. Mr. Hampton said to the waiter, "All right, tell him to begin." And to the distant figure, he waved a hand, a signal which the latter apparently understood, for he disappeared.

"Ramon says we must begin dinner," Mr. Hampton announced, turning to Don Ferdinand on his right. And he rapped on the table, and made a similar announcement. "You'll all have to sit down and be good," he added, "or the old fellow's heart will be broken. He wouldn't let anybody, not even the caterer, oversee this dinner but himself. Says he owes it to Jack for lifting from him a load that oppressed him for years."

CHAPTER XXV.

CONCLUSION.

It was a hot June day when little more than a month later, two commodious limousines keeping close together rolled along the last few miles of the Boston Post Road, coming from the South, and entered New Haven. How strange and yet familiar seemed the streets of the famous college city to the lithe, sunburned young fellow at the wheel of the foremost car. This way and that darted his glance, as the car passed Poli's and many another place enshrined in memories and traditions, and he was kept continually busy pointing out landmarks to the dark olive-tinted beauty beside him.

It was still early in the day, for they had left New York at an early hour. But already the crush of automobiles coming and going in the streets was dense. And as they drew near a great green square resembling a public park, in the very heart of the business section, the traffic became so dense and slow-moving that the young fellow was compelled

to give all his attention to his driving and to crawl, start, stop continually.

It was on his companion that the first sight of the noble group of buildings, wide-stretching amid stately elms, on the other side of the green square, dawned. She clutched his arm, while her eyes opened wide.

"Oh, Jack, how you must love it."

"Uh-huh," grunted Jack, casting one swift look toward the dear familiar buildings of Old Eli. "But don't grab me like that again, please, or we'll be crawling up on top of this car ahead."

A few blocks farther, on a side street, Jack rolled into a garage already almost filled with cars and, while he was assisting Rafaela to alight, the second car drew in. From it stepped Mr. and Mrs. Temple and Mr. Hampton. From the first car Jack helped out Don Ferdinand and then Bob's sister, Della. A slim, charming girl, with the springy step and quick yet graceful movements of a veteran tennis player, she well merited all the devotion which Frank Merrick showered on her. During Rafaela's week in New York, shopping for her trousseau, a warm friendship had grown up between the two girls. Della's chum, Marjorie, to whom big Bob had of late been paying marked attentions, was already in New Haven, and would meet them later.

"Now to find the fellows," said Jack, when all were assembled. "And there's no getting around the streets in a car in this crowd, which is why I brought you here. Come on, fall in line."

Chattering gaily, the little party set out with Jack leading, Rafaela clinging to his arm.

"It's rather old-fashioned, Mother, for a girl to lean on a man's arm like this," whispered Della in an undertone. "But I like it. I think she's charming, don't you?"

"These Southern girls," replied Mrs. Temple in the same guarded tone, "I always did consider them more attractive than you mannish young women."

Whereat Della laughed lightly, nor felt any hurt. She knew none was intended.

"Oh, there's Tubby Devore," she cried the next moment. And running forward, she gripped Jack' free arm and pointed. "Jack, Jack, there's Tubby Devore, and Johnny Malcolm, and Pinky Atwell, and—and—why, there are Frank and Bob. Oh, call to them, Jack."

Whereat Jack raised his voice, and in a moment the group thus hailed came plunging through the crowd, to surround the newcomers, pay their laughing respects to Della—an old acquaintance—and to slap Jack thunderously on the back and hail him as "Benedict." To all of which Jack appeared brazenly indifferent, and presented each in turn to

Rafaela, "who," he said, "is soon going to have an awful job on her hands. Give her your pity lads. She's going to look after me."

But if we were to follow our friends throughout the festivities and occasions of that and succeeding days, we would need another book or two. It was Commencement Week, and New Haven was going through its annual madness. Enough to say that indoors or out, at dance or tea or in the Bowl, Jack everywhere came in for attention as a distinguished young alumnus whose radio research already was bringing him and the institution fame, while Rafaela with her Spanish beauty offset by a ravishing accent and a spirit of mischief forever lurking beneath the surface was acclaimed by all Jack's friends as a jolly good sort, indeed. As for big Bob, it was with genuine regret that those old alumni who followed Yale sports from season to season spoke of his graduation. He was leaving a record in practically all departments of athletics which everybody considered would remain unsurpassed for a long time to come. And Frank's graduation equally was a matter for regret, among the undergraduate body especially, inasmuch as he had endeared himself to its members by his democratic spirit and charm of manner.

At length, however, all good things must end, and it was so with Commencement Week. The day

came when New Haven was only a memory, and all our friends were back in New York, though not in New York City, but on the adjoining Hampton and Temple estates near Southampton. Ahead of the young folks lay a long Summer with the prospects of gay companions coming and going, tennis, yachting, motor boating on the waters of Great South Bay and the broad Atlantic, golf and dancing, motoring and horseback riding. Della who was a born manager had taken charge of affairs, and had planned a round of gayeties leading up to the approaching marriage of Jack and Rafaela. The latter and Don Ferdinand were guests of the Temples. And, of course, in between everything else and, in fact, forming at first the major attraction for at least two members of the party, were the innumerable visits to New York paid by the two girls and Mrs. Temple in pursuit of that elusive thing known as "Rafaela's trousseau."

Many times did the swift-moving events at Laredo and at Don Ferdinand's Mexican estate come up for discussion, and every item of occurrences had to be rehearsed time and again, with the exception of how Rafaela had been captured and conveyed to Laredo.

By tacit consent, that was never brought up for discussion because of the horrors surrounding it in Rafaela's recollection. It was known that a lieu-

tenant of Ramirez's, who had been hiding in the hills near the estate, had swooped down the day after Jack and his father had concluded their brief visit, and, after smashing the radio station, had carried Rafaela off from under the eyes of the few peons left behind by Don Ferdinand and Pedro and from the despairing clutches of Donna Ana. More dead than alive, the poor girl had been swept up into the hills. But when she found that whatever fate was intended for her was to be deferred until she could be transported on horseback to Nueva Laredo and turned over to Ramirez, her courage and resourcefulness revived. She watched for an opportunity, and, when on arrival at Nueva Laredo, she found Ramon in almost as sad plight as herself, she instantly began working to bring the old fellow around to the point of helping her escape. The two, as we know, were in the act of carrying out their desperate attempt when Jack fortunately and opportunely arrived with his comrades and the aviators to rescue her.

But of the tortured hours that lay between the sudden attack of the bandits on her home and Jack's arrival, she could never be persuaded to talk, and so, by common consent, the matter was never pressed.

One day during this golden vacation period Jack went into New York, not returning until the next

day. Then he arrived jubilant. He had come straight from hours spent with the chief engineers and officials of the great radio trust, and so fulsome had been the praise heaped on his young head on account of the successful outcome of his year's experiments that modesty forbade him to repeat more than a tithe of it. Indeed, many another head—and many a good deal older than Jack's—might have been turned; but his sat too squarely, he saw too sanely for conceit to gain a foothold.

Enough to say that all Jack's work had been fully approved, and that he would soon have the pleasure of seeing his improved radio equipment on the world market. He had solved the problem of providing super-selectivity with a radio receiver permitting the operator to select any station he wanted to hear, whether or not local stations were in operation—a receiver that brought volume from distant stations along with selectivity, that attained a more faithful reproduction of broadcasted voice and music than ever deemed possible before, and that, moreover, was eternally "non-radiating;" that is to say, that no matter how handled it would never interfere with a neighboring radio enthusiast's enjoyment. And he had transformed the Super-Heterodyne, theretofore so complicated that engineering skill was required for its operation, until

now it was improved in sensitiveness and selectivity and simplified so that anybody could operate it.

"And what do you get for your work?" the practical Mr. Temple wanted to know.

"I don't know," said Jack. "Maybe, millions. The radio trust financed my experiments, as you know, and you might think it would now offer me a lump sum and buy my work outright. But, although there were one or two men who wanted to do that, the balance were very decent about it. The upshot is that I have a contractual agreement, paying me a fixed royalty on all sales of my patented articles."

"You got them to do that?" said Mr. Temple, getting up and shaking Jack by the hand. "Well, I'll say you're a business man. How about it, Hampton?" And he turned toward Jack's father.

"Jack knows how I feel," said Mr. Hampton, smiling. "But the big thing to him, and I guess to me, too, is not the fact that he probably will reap a fortune but rather that he has succeeded in advancing the cause of science."

"And now what are you planning to do?" persisted Mr. Temple, while the others—the whole party was present on the shaded slope of lawn beside the Temple tennis courts—listened for Jack's answer.

Jack pretended a secretiveness which he did not

feel, and his make-believe was so pronounced that the others all began to smile.

"Hist," he said, gazing around, with hand, palm extended, shading his eyes. "Any enemies of the radio trust on hand? No, well then I can speak. But only in strictest secrecy, mind that, everybody. As soon as"—a twinkling glance at Rafaela—"as soon as I go under new management, I'm to be detailed to Washington."

"Washington? What for?" cried Bob.

And, "Yes, what for?" echoed others. Mr. Hampton and Rafaela, who already had been admited to the secret, alone remained silent.

"There's a man down there who also has been experimenting on radio," Jack said, "but along different lines. He is trying to find out the laws controlling radio waves for the transmission of vision. Well, maybe, I didn't put that just right. But this is what he's after: He's trying to evolve a radio device for the broadcasting of scenes. Thus, for instance, there would be a broadcasting equipment when the President takes his oath of office, when Babe Ruth plays ball, when the Belmont Stakes or the Kentucky Derby are run, when Bill Tilden and Suzanne Lenglen take on the world at tennis, when a new play is given its premiere; and the fellow sitting out in the mountains, far from everywhere, or over in our house or yours,

Bob, with special equipment, why, he'd see it all, just as if he were present. And he'd hear, too. What do you think of that?"

Various expressions of disbelief rose from the group, except that Bob and Frank sat silent, nodding their heads.

"It's bound to come," said Frank, when the others had in a measure subsided.

And Bob added with conviction: "It'll come if Jack helps out this old professor."

And after a moment he added gloomily:

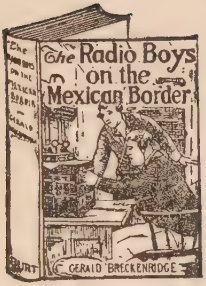
"But Frank and I won't be in on it. We'll be down in the shipping room stencilling exports."

A merry laugh, which Bob somehow felt was a bit unfeeling, greeted this reference to the fact that at the end of the Summer vacation he and Frank were scheduled to enter the export house which their respective fathers had built up as partners, and which Mr. Temple had conducted alone since the death of his associate and lifelong friend, Frank's father, years before.

"Cheer up, Bob," said Jack. "You expressed somewhat the same sentiments, if I remember aright, down in Laredo not so long ago. Nothing exciting was ever going to happen to you again, you said. Yet look at all the fun you had the very next minute."

And so, with this little prevision of the future, let us bid a temporary farewell to the Radio Boys, feeling fairly well assured that when we next encounter them Jack, and not Bob, will prove to have been the better prophet.

THE END.



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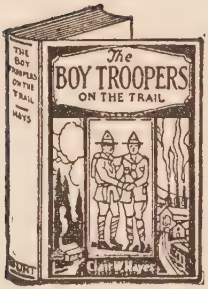

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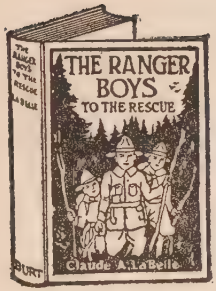

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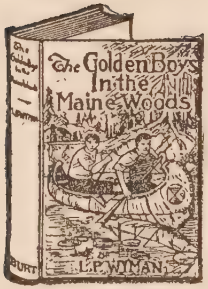

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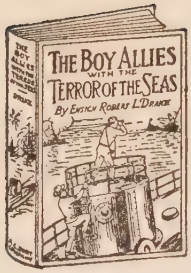

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